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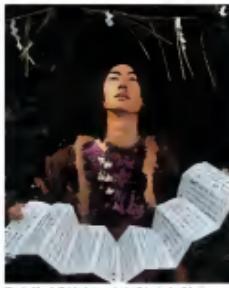
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# MICHAEL NYMAN | AT 60



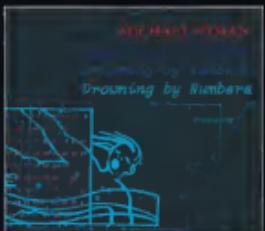
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# Letters

**Write to: Letters, *The Wire*, 2nd Floor East, 88-94 Wentworth Street, London E1 7SA, UK**  
**Fax +44 (0)20 7422 5011, email [letters@thewire.co.uk](mailto:letters@thewire.co.uk)**  
**Letters should include a full name and address**



Blood on their hands: CLOUD9DEAD

## Blue skies thinking

Thanks for the cover photo (CLOUD9DEAD, *The Wire* 242) of three dubiously bearded blokes in white overalls, their hands apparently dripping with blood. But that one really brought the uncommitted browsers flocking to the till in WH Smith.

It's a shame you couldn't have put Ligeti on the cover instead. In my reckoning it's been almost five years since you last bestowed this honour on a modern composer (*Stockhausen*, issue 184). Surely a major interview with arguably the greatest living composer merits highlighting more than (to quote David Stubbs) "three shapeless, skinny dudes who exude a maddly catatonic air in their press shots".

Richard Rees Jones Brighton, UK

## Bear market

I enjoyed Julian Cowley's interviews with the former members of Art Bears (*The Wire* 242). I read a review once of their first two albums by Robert Christgau, and was tantalised as to what they would sound like. Having picked up Henry Cow's great *Western Culture* record and Siapp Happy's debut, I imagined some hybrid of Frank Zappa, structured chaos and austere artness, but perhaps I'll never really find out for myself.

You see, despite Chris Cutler's worthy ideals of a committed left-wing form of music, not many listeners can afford to buy a coffee table box set with all the trimmings. Why not release the three records separately, so the curious can investigate, rather than just the over-indulged or someone else in the music biz?

I sympathise strongly with the group's sentiments. A kind of bland, passionless irony pervades much of the arts today, reeking of know-all condescension. Luckily, for me as a child in the 80s, all I seem to remember is being dragged along to GLC/CND marches or

witnessing bizarre performance (music/art) at the ICA. So perhaps Margaret Thatcher did provoke people either into submission or anti-authoritarian anger more than today's shadowy climate. Anyhow, don't be elitist. Maybe you need to make money, Cutler, Frib and Krause, but let the people hear your music, or else you'll lose relevance completely.

On another note altogether, good to hear Jennifer Herrema of Royal Trux is back on the radar (Brixtonream, same issue). I was wondering what had happened to one of the most uncompromised and sometimes downright terrifying singers of the last decade. Thank you and keep up the good work.

Chris Jones London, UK

R/R report that Art Bears' CDs will be available separately from April/May onwards. Price of £45. The Art Box works out at £7.50 per CD. Meanwhile, at the time of going to press, [www.megacorp.com](http://www.megacorp.com) was listing Art Bears' debut LP *Hopes And Fears* for £5. Not exactly elitist pricing policies – Ed

Just sending praise for two great features in *The Wire* 242: Julian Cowley's Art Bears piece was very informative. On Fred Frith mentioning that there was once talk of him being a possible contender to be in the producer's chair for The Sex Pistols, my mind has been short-circuiting as to how things may have turned out. Henry Cow sometimes came out with raw-edged musical moments, like sections of the live track "Groningen" on the 1976 album *Concerts*, and Frith's own liking for the short-singaporean songform, the 'what if?' scenario is a pleasure to mull over. If memory serves me well, in 1974 he waded jingly in one of the UK music weeklies about the early 60s Kinks hit, "You Really Got Me", which was featured as part of his "Guitar Solos" column. Looking at his very broad musical talents and experience (even 30 years ago), maybe he might have sculpted The Pistols' sound into

something more off-kilter, given John Lydon's past comments about the early unreleased Pistols sounding "more like the PN stuff". What if? indeed.

The other great feature was Edwin Pouncey's overview of the No Wave titanic winners, Mars. I'm still amazed that their track "Helen Fonda'sale" was played on BBC Radio 1 on a Sunday afternoon in 1979. This was part of David Bowie's paylet, when he was invited to play some of his favourite music of the day. I wonder how many listeners were startled by the sound of Summer Crane's Goon-sounding Bluebottle vocal gymnastics? That's what I like, articles which make you think!

Tim Jones via email

## Missing Eric

First and foremost, many thanks for publishing the Mingus Primer (*The Wire* 240), as it will help the next generation of Mingus lovers sort their way through a large and somewhat disorganized catalogue. As someone who discovered Mingus in the 70s, I am surprised by the lack of attention given to the George Adams/Don Pullen line-ups from that time frame.

Changes One and Two were the gems of the second Atlantic era, and much better realised than the flawed records that are given as examples of that era. Although I realise the need to concentrate on legitimate recordings available on CD, the 1964 line-up with Eric Dolphy might have been better served by another inclusion (or maybe *Fantasy* can be persuaded to reissue *The Great Concert* of Charles Mingus). And a brief mention of the Live in Chelmsford 1972 bootleg release might have helped cover the brief period when Donnie Richmond was not in the band.

Enough complaints! Keep up the great work, and how about an Eric Dolphy feature in the near future? Luis Torregrosa Trenton, USA

# BONNIE "PRINCE" BILLY

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## Disco discourse

I found Peter Shapiro's review of my book *Love Saves The Day: A History Of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-79*, (*The Wire* 240) a little puzzling. Contrary to Peter's suggestion, I do discuss the relationship between Stonewall, gay pride and the politics of the gay discotheque in painstaking detail. Likewise, the unique characteristics that made disco happen in New York and not "Pediatric Kentucky" – its position as the preeminent gay metropolis in the Western world, unique concentration of record companies and multiracial makeup – are evoked time and time again. I resolutely refuse to suggest that DJs created disco out of thin air, and note that many early dance hits could not be attributed to the DJs. Etc, etc.

Peter's more substantial point – that *Love Saves The Day* fails to discuss the music of the period in enough detail – touches on the greatest dilemma I faced while writing the book: how to simultaneously discuss the DJs, the dance venues and the music simultaneously? In the end I concluded that the DJs and the venues were the motor that drove 1970s dance culture, and the emphasis I gave to these players led me to subtitle the book *A History Of Dance Music Culture* (which contains a very different promise to that of *A History Of Dance Music*).

Nevertheless I make a point of repeatedly referencing the records that DJs played throughout the book, and in the last seven chapters I devote roughly equal sections to the DJs, the clubs and the music. The music is discussed in terms of key aesthetic developments, important transitions in production and remixing, and the life cycle of influential records in the wider music industry, as well as the way in which dance music in many respects ran counter to the priorities of rock.

No doubt other authors will write books that will discuss 70s music in more detail and I expect that these – like, I hope, *Love Saves The Day* – will contribute to our understanding of the period.

Tim Lawrence via email

## Bowling action

The "black British painter named Frank Bowling" mentioned by Greg Tate (*Invisible Jukebox*, *The Wire* 240) is undoubtedly the Guyanese artist Frank Bowling. Known for his large canvases, Bowling came to England in 1960 and studied at the Slade and Royal College of Art. He soon built himself a reputation, if not establishment recognition, and after winning a prize at the First World Festival of Negro Art in Senegal in 1965, he moved to New York the following year. He returned to England ten years later and has continued to exhibit on both sides of the Atlantic. His work is represented in the collections of the Tate Gallery, New

York's Museum of Modern Art and Metropolitan Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. In 1989, 15 of his paintings were shown at the Hayward Gallery in the exhibition *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*; mostly his huge acrylic on canvas works, they were an impressive sight.

Vai Wilmer London, UK

## Amen corner

I just wanted to address a review of my CD in your magazine (*Dub, The Wire* 240). The reviewer seemed to suggest that Todd Mullins and I (*Soundmurdere & Sk-1*) also produced under the name Remarc and lumped our two CDs together. Remarc (aka Marc Forrester) is one of the pioneers of the much-loved "Amen" Jungle style that we try to emulate. Remarc has an album out on Planet Mu titled *Soundmurdere*. Todd and myself have a self-titled album on Rephlex. I've seen countless reviews for both and this has not happened before, but I can kind of understand the mix-up and wanted to clear up any misunderstanding that the review might give people.

Todd Osborne via email

## Wrong room

Thank you very much for the review of my CD *Room With Sky* (*The Wire* 240). I self-released this CD in an edition of 50 (sold out), on a self-named label Chaba Recordings. Unfortunately, it seems you listed the contact for my CD as [www.chaba-net.com](http://www.chaba-net.com), which is the website for an unrelated group called Chaba. The current information about *Room With Sky* can be found at: [www.johnhudak.net/room\\_with\\_sky](http://www.johnhudak.net/room_with_sky)

*Room With Sky* will be officially released in a first edition of 500 copies, with a remastering by Stephan Mathieu on the spooki label ([www.spooki.net](http://www.spooki.net)) in June/July 2004. Again, thanks for the positive review!

John Hudak via email

## Bonding over Bananafish

After three months with a broken arm, which came at the tail end of a year marked by pain, worry and too many trips to the emergency room, it was getting hard to smile. Then came the latest issue (*The Wire* 240). I've always found the Epiphanies section interesting, as a lovely contrast to the rest of each issue. If nothing else, I've always held *The Wire* dear for the way a variety of artists and writers can inspire with their ideas. In reading Marc Master's piece on Bananafish I was reminded how my Sparkle Girl partner Kurt and I met and bonded over an issue of Bananafish. A discussion over the magazine and related music led to noise jam session which became Sparkle Girl, the Seattle noise duo that gives it away for free. Bananafish continues to be an inspiration to us and to

see it trumpeted in the only other music magazine I read these days was a treat (although Kurt did describe Ed Pien's fantastic zine *The Sound Projector* as a cross between *Bananafish* and *The Wire*, and it has since completed the trek). Special kudos for attacking each issue in one go. We find ourselves having to apply new methods of reading since time an issue appears.

Jim Evans Seattle, USA

## Grenoble étrangers ennobled

First excuse me for my very bad English. I have read *The Wire* for years, maybe since the beginning, I still think it's the best magazine for groups that are unknown by the large public.

In the *The Wire* 239, I read the article about Jerome Noetinger and I see that he was from Grenoble in France. Grenoble is an industrial city where a lot of good groups are born. Vivenz, Noetinger's "équipe", Miss Kittin, The Hockers, and particularly Etant Donnés. I can understand that Jerome wouldn't talk about Etant Donnés, but a professional writer, in a magazine like *The Wire*, has to make a minimum of investigation of the different groups that explore electroacoustic music, especially in a little city like Grenoble.

In the past 20 years they have made six or seven records, OK, they made totally different records afterwards, working with people like Alan Vega, Genesis P-Orridge, Michael Gira and Lydia Lunch, and made concerts and films that stay very far from their beginnings, but you can't forget them when speaking about someone from Grenoble.

It's really difficult to know something about this "strange" duo, but, for example, they put out a book *Wonderland* with a CD two years ago and last year a fabulous CD on Virgin of music from the French film *La Vie Nouvelle* (by Philippe Grandjean, who is working with Alan Vega on the fantastic film *Somnibus*), and I never see one word in your magazine about it. It's not too late for speaking about them: courage, miss amist Laurent Grenoble, France

## Corrections

Issue 241 in the article on Mars, the song "11,000 Volts" was incorrectly titled "11,000 Watts". A subbing error in Brian Morton's review of Carl Michael Von Hausswolff and John Duncan's *Shun Shusher* confused Prato, the Italian location of the Nicola Formetto Gallery, with Madrid's Prado Museum. In Clive Bell's Global column, a subbing error in the review of *Les Femmes De Tétoyan* *Of Rejoicing* stated that King Mohammed VI came to the Moroccan throne 35 years ago. In fact it was five years ago. □

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# Bitstream

News and more from under the radar.

Compiled by The Trawler



Feedback to basics: Alvin Lucier

**I Am Sitting in A Room** composer Alvin Lucier makes a rare UK live appearance this summer as part of a Contemporary Music Network tour entitled **Feedback**.

**Phanomra.** Following the success of the tours *Japanorama* and *Turntable Hell*, this package tour, curated by Resonance 104.4FM's Knut Aufermann, will also include performances by composer, improviser and editor of the *Leonardo Music Journal*, Nicolas Collins; Japanese multi-experimentalist, Otomo Yoshihide; noise/mix master Toshimaru Nakamura; Sarah Washington of Improv outfit *Re:Spangle*; Austrian video artist and sometime Megal label collaborator Billy Reisz; and Xertos' "Fray" Bentos of UK pluckedphono trio *Die Trix Computer Die*. Singly and together they will be exploring the state of sound repeating on itself in a celebration of acoustic and informational feedback. The tour is slated for late June/early July. [>>>](http://www.cmtnet.org.uk)

London's V&A museum is staging **Shhhh...**, a sound exhibition, in May, in which visitors will be able to tour the historical taboos and artefacts of the Victoria building while listening to a custom-made MP3 player containing selections of sound and music created by a variety of invited musicians and artists. A map guides you to various sound installations around the museum. Participating artists include David Byrne, Cornelius, ex-Ceuteau Twin Elizabeth Fraser, Faustine, Gillian Weir, Jane & Louise Wilson, Jeremy Deller, Leila Arib, Roots Manuva and Simon Fisher Turner. **Shhhh...** runs from 20 May until 30 August. [>>>](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

Two titanic free improvisation trios face off at the opening night of this year's **Freedom Of The City** festival in London. The opening event features the reformation of the radical electronic outfit **MEV** (*Musica Electronica Viva*), with a line-up featuring original members Alvin Curran, Frederic Rzewski and Richard Teitelbaum. **MEV's** longform noise Improv underscored the radical political movements of Europe in the late 60s and early 70s, and forged links between the world's academic composition, Fluxus art and free jazz. Their British equivalent, **ANM**, also appear on the same bill: the long-standing trio of Keith Rowe, Eddie Prevost and

John Tilbury open the event at 2pm. **Freedom Of The City** features a wide selection of sets by British and European improvisors, and runs from 1-3 May at London Conway Hall. [>>>](mailto:foto@menemendes.com) **David Toop's** new book, *Haunted Weather: Music, Silence And Memory*, is set to be published by Serpents Tail on 12 May. The book, whose title (according to the author) is "a metaphorical term to suggest a period of uncertainty, excitement and profound change", grapples with the sheer volume of music now composed, recorded, archived, distributed and played back in digital form, and Toop surveys the current state of music practice in various forms including personal memoirs, reportage and travelogue. The book is accompanied by a double CD compilation, also called *Haunted Weather*, issued by German label Strutgold, with tracks by Chet Watson, Keith Rowe & John Tilbury, David Cunningham, Oval, Spontaneous Music Ensemble, and more. [www.serpentstail.com](http://www.serpentstail.com). [>>>](http://www.strutgold.de) Reverent Records have confirmed the release of a nine CD box set of unreleased recordings by the great free saxophonist **Albert Ayler**. Entitled *Holy Ghost*, the set collates many recordings that have circulated for several years as bootlegs, as well as much completely unused material, including Albert and Don Ayler's searing performance of "Our Prayer" at the funeral of John Coltrane in July 1967, plus evidence of Ayler's stint as a sideman with Cecil Taylor in 1962. The set is intended to fill in the gaps in appreciating the totality of Ayler's career, which was cut short by his untimely and mysterious death in 1970. **Holy Ghost** is slated for release in October 2004. [>>>](http://www.reverentrecords.com)

**Scott Walker**, whose last album *Tilt* came out back in 1995, has left his record label Mercury and signed to 4AD. He is just embarking on recording sessions for his next album, although details and a possible release date are still most points at this stage. [>>>](http://) Chicago post-rock outfit **Town & Country** are set to play a handful of US live shows with drone musician and theorist **Tony Conrad** in May. Appearances confirmed so

far include Buffalo Sound Lab (9 May), Bard College (10) and New York Tonic (11 or 12). Dates will be confirmed shortly. [>>>](http://www.thinjockey.com) With the death in February of **Trevor Manwaring** at the age of 49 and after a long illness, London's underground music community lost one of its most passionate and committed figures. Trevor worked for the UK branch of the French label and distributor *Harmonie Mundi*. The company specialised in contemporary classical, jazz and World Music, but thanks to Trevor's involvement it also became a crucial outlet for all manner of uncategoryable underground and outsider music. In particular, his relentless championing of the Japanese PSF label played a major role in alerting an international audience to the music of the likes of Keiji Haino and Acid Mothers Temple. In addition, Trevor's own labels, *Paratextile* and *Chronoscope*, undefined his passion for the most uncompromising music, issuing new and archive recordings by the likes of Derek Bailey, Evan Parker and guitarist Gary Smith. A long term supporter of *The Wire* in his professional life, Trevor was also a personal friend to many of the magazine's staff and freelance writers. He will be sorely missed. [>>>](http://) **Roger Sutherland**, Scratch Orchestra alumna, author of the book *New Perspectives in Music* (*Sun Tavern Fields* 1994) and founder member of the English improvising electroacoustic group **Morphogenesis**, also died in February, at the age of 56. He was prodigiously well-informed about the musical and visual arts, and for almost three decades he had contributed articles to a host of magazines and journals including *London Magazine*, *Resonance*, *Art And Artists*, *The Wire* and, latterly, *Tempo*. **Morphogenesis** came into being in 1985 when, at the end of a course he taught at City University on New and Experimental Musics, some of the students "simply refused to go home". In recent years, ill health kept him from performing with the group, but he supported them in any way he could, and to the end his commitment to art and music was undiminished. [>>>](http://) Additional material by Brian Marley

"Trane was the father. Pharaoh was the son. I was the holy ghost."



ALBERT AYLER

HOLY GHOST: RARITIES 1962-70 MULTI CD SET

OCTOBER 2004 FROM REVERENT RECORDS

"We were raised that greed is evil and fuck security, live in the moment and die in a blight. We didn't go to the doctor much but we watched *The Cosby Show* and ate casserole," Sisters Sierra (24) and Bianca (21) Cassidy — aka CocoRosie — were born in Iowa and Hawaii respectively, and lived a nomadic life with their mother, a Cherokee teacher turned painter. The two sisters like to dress up, and their jingling jewellery provides a percussive backdrop to the crash course in off-kilter blues that is *La Maison De Mon Rêve* (*The House Of My Dreams*), their debut album on Touch And Go. Important childhood lessons were "freedom and non-attachment — moving on — stuff like that," says Bianca over the phone from their Brooklyn nest. "We really don't feel like we have a home. I've been in love with New York. We love Paris, but we also feel at home living out of a suitcase, usually getting over stuff, hitting the road."

This "ritually getting over stuff" is the driving force behind *La Maison De Mon Rêve*. The sisters lost contact and led separate lives for a long while. Sierra was all set up in Paris and busy going to opera school when Bianca showed up unannounced. Soon after they were knee-deep in home recording, in a tiny apartment located in the 18th arrondissement. Their attention withered; they got over stuff.

Located somewhere between Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday on one side, and Cocteau Twins and Roxanne Shante on the other, *La Maison* is earthy and romantic but also folksy, dreamy and ethereal. The occasional cheap, ironic beatbox cracks up the solemn landscape. The Southern blues drawl they adept is not studied, but reflects a genuine love for a pre-war sound, a longing for a time past, and a place that no longer exists. "I don't feel connected to any particular time — even to this time," Bianca elaborates. "This is not a very romantic time, so we connect to bits of romance in other eras. When I sit down to write, I can't have my cellphone even in my periphery. All the objects in my room are old, I can't deal with new things. We are always indulging in creating our own reality and having

something around that marks 'the now' interferes with that time travelling freedom of being anywhere at any time."

Paris's cobbled streets and Gothic cathedrals proved the perfect mise-en-scène for their harried, bewitched fantasy world, something New York's modern buzz couldn't provide. "Something about France is dead, maybe dormant," she continues. "It's so much about the past, the old architecture. The streets of Paris reek with arousal and everyone is so nicely perfumed. New York is too busy for love."

The shrill gospel vocals on "There! Rein Song" sound like they were recorded inside an empty cookie jar and sung by a small congregation of hamsters, more reminiscent of the 1930s recordings found on Harry Smith's *Anthology Of American Folk Music* than anything produced today. But intuition, not technology allows them to come up with such a sound. "We're not attracted to technology," Bianca asserts. "We recorded *La Maison* on the most basic equipment. It challenged us creatively because we had to use our minds to create what we wanted with almost nothing. From my experience when I can sit down with something that has too many options I lose that innovative sense."

Bianca is the writer (and talker — the interview was conducted almost entirely with her) but is quick to emphasize CocoRosie's symbiotic working relationship. "We work in very close proximity to one another, it's a little happening," she explains. "It happens the same moment. Sierra will do a little tinkering on the piano, I'll get the typewriter and maybe she'll write the chorus — it just develops really fast. I feel she understands my writing really well so if I write something and I come to her with that, she knows how to articulate it melodically. Her language is definitely in the melodies and I'm more oriented towards writing. But it's a random conglomeration. Sometimes we swap places."

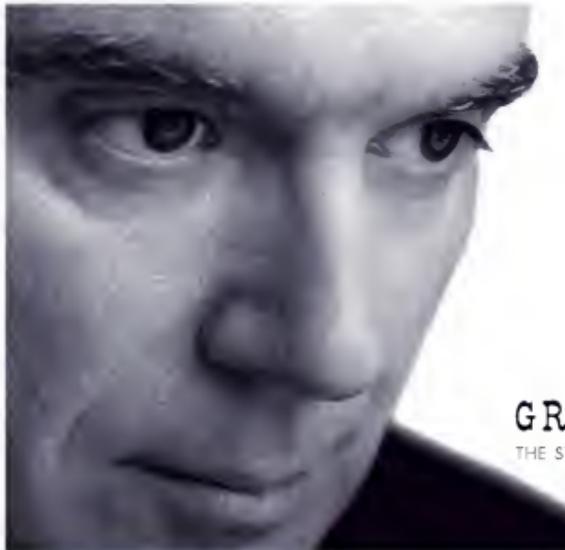
*La Maison* was the result of their first attempt at playing together even though they both have been heading towards making music separately. Sierra was

seduced by medieval sacred choral music back in high school and wanted to study that when her voice attracted attention. "Right away all these people circled around me and decided that my voice was an operatic voice. So I didn't end up with the chance to sing medieval music. They decided that my voice was more Mozart and Puccini". The song "CandyLand", with its careful harp arrangement accompanied by Sierra's soaring soprano lament and rhythmic grunting noises, pays tribute to the skills she learned in opera school.

She eventually dropped out, however. "Probably one of the main problems," posits Sierra, "was that in the society of classical music and opera there is a really narrow and particular audience — upper class elitist. And if you have aspirations of doing modern music, it still is a very narrow group of people that you get to work with and there ended up not being enough doorways for me. The other thing is, that community has such a narrow mind about the creator, the composer." When she voiced an interest in writing music as well as singing, she encountered resistance. "It was seen as too ambitious; they aren't into the multitasking type of thing. It's just one road in that community, you choose one specialty. I ended up just wanting to really expand and wanted to be so much more than just a soprano."

Sierra's classical background has provided fertile ground for the duo to play within. Her technique is used as a structure that can be filled with impulsive ideas, maverick recording techniques and sonic experiments that the classical world rejected. "Sierra is a real Nazi about giving ourselves a mathematical structure to work to," Bianca quips. "She insists on really regimented math and it's not the way I would approach music when I'm on my own — I make such a mess when I do something by myself but when I stick my mess within her maths it's like something beautiful is born." □ *La Maison De Mon Rêve* is released in April on Touch And Go





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# DEAN ROBERTS

Lost city rambler. By Rob Young

"I like to get songs to find their place in the air and sort of float there," says Dean Roberts, who began his career in his native New Zealand in the groups Theta and, later, White Winged Moth, where the larval flutterings of his current sound began to pupate. The lepidopterine moniker holds good across Roberts's subsequent endeavours, for his stylistic trait is a feather-light take on free rock.

White Winged Moth's last record, *She's Blanket*, was released in 1998. After that, Roberts went rogue, adopting a nomadic life that took him from Australia to Europe, the United States, and back to Europe again, emitting the occasional radio bleep in the form of CDs on Mile Putesux, Ritomel, Kranky and Einstweiler.

"I have moved around a lot," acknowledges Roberts by email on a temporary retreat in NZ. "I have travelled pretty extensively over the last ten years. I have settled for long periods in different places. First New York, then Bologna, now Vienna. Having different places to call home is a really wonderful part of it."

One of those homes, New York, was the setting for *And The Black Moths Play The Grand Cinema*, which displayed these fragile, post-apocalyptic visits for the first time. Recorded in what sounded like an enormous, cold loft, ghostly electric-acoustic songs were interrupted by digital interventions with which he'd previously been experimenting more explicitly on 1998's *All Cracked Media*. "I wrote and recorded *And The Black Moths...* in 1999 with Tim Barnes," he says, adding that he has drawn a line under that kind of explicit play with digital media. "A lot of innovation with computers happened in a big wave, but it's become increasingly mundane and personally I don't think I can work with it. I've always been a guitar player and the computer has been a useful extension from time to time, especially in terms of arrangement and transfiguration. The music I'm doing now is essentially live, real-time music."

After working with outsider songwriter Matthew Valentine, cellist and La Monte Young associate Charles Curtis, and guitarist Alan Licht, Roberts made one more recording, this time with Austrian Werner

Dafeldecker, *Aluminium* (Einstweiler 2000), before slipping off the radar for another three years. In fact, he had quietly relocated to Bologna where he hooked up with multi-instrumentalist improvisors Giuseppe Ielasi, Valerio Tricotti, Christian Alati and others, and worked up his new release, *Be Mine Tonight* (Kranky). Over the years Roberts has perfected an idiosyncratic recording technique that draws on the resonant properties of individual rooms. By orienting his instruments and voice around a single central microphone and one boundary mic attached to the wall, he achieves striking effects matched with a cinematic ear. "On *Be Mine Tonight*," he says, "I choreographed my parts round this stereo mic configuration, so I would be singing different parts at varying distances from the mic, and backing vocals from the hallway, through open French doors into the adjacent room. If we wanted a faraway guitar sound, Valerio would just move the amplifier around the house as opposed to using some horrible reverber effect."

"I can't imagine these songs produced in any other way," he goes on. "If the windows started rattling, the electric guitar buzzes, if I struggle for breath or whatever, it's the nature of the take. The way weird spatial distortions happen. It's kind of like film, you have your point of focus that sits in the frame and moves within a setting – the staging and context is everything."

*Be Mine Tonight*'s four longform tracks all build on small fragile elements: the ringing of Roberts's Fender Telecaster or his isolated piano clusters, the patterning of Antonio Arribalzaga's brushed percussion. The songs smoulder, but instead of bursting into flames, as might be expected, they tend to burn down to embers and glow faintly in the twilight long after the singer has departed the scene. This frayed approach is pursued on a new, as yet unreleased recording Roberts has made with Dafeldecker and increasingly ubiquitous drummer Martijn Brandimayr (of Rodan and Trapist), which should emerge later this year. Roberts mentions he's drawn to "weird songwriters" of the 1970s such as Brian Eno, but the closest points of comparison are

Talk Talk's autumnal *Spirit Of Eden*, bits of Miles Davis's tricking *In A Silent Way*, occasionally the op art illusions of Can's rhythmic section. "I suppose my attraction to rock music has always been towards this sort of suggested harmony or the purely sonic elements," comments Roberts. "Arrangements as a juxtaposition of textures; having loose arrangements that can be reconfigured or extended. The actual form is very flexible in my songs, so it is more a matter of reshaping the songs every time I play."

Roberts's employment of Improv musicians reinvigorates their free music by finding the space for more rhythmic structures derived from rock and jazz. His lyrics are a dense and private poetry, laden with imagery that points to the way cities filter out traces of humanity, leaving the anonymous narrator and other characters – "Marxist friends", "the sole palomino in town" – to wander the streets whose spectacles and distractions are resistant to meaningful protest.

"Characters crop up again, and the same people from *The Black Moths Play The Grand Cinema* are there in *Be Mine Tonight*," he acknowledges. "They are getting a little more theatrical. They also crop up in the recordings. I have just done with Dafeldecker and Brandimayr. This time they have names and are a little bit more specific about the situations they're in. The majority of my time is spent developing these lyrical and vocal ideas and how to put people into music and to really sing. It's kind of like a play, a serial. I'm very interested in a kind of poetry, literature, theatre, cinema, pop music, art that works with a detailed observation and study of the human condition. My songs tend to go through themes of capital, migration and disappearance, blurred in with the classic themes: desire, hope, fear, love, etcetera."

Everything hinges on reduction, he concludes. "Pages [of notes] are often boiled down to a few lines. I've been seriously into Robert Ashley and that has influenced the way I approach the subject matter, or at least composition of lyrics. I often have two or more tracks running simultaneously, and lyrics become a dialogue." □ *Be Mine Tonight* is out now on Kranky



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Pelican  
(from left to right):  
Sarah Berner,  
Trevor De Bruyn,  
Laurent Lebec and  
Larry Mullen

track in the late 1980s and early 1990s, only to sound like someone had erased the vocal track from otherwise unimpressive Metal riff fests. When Pelican are at their best, as on *Australasia*, it's impossible to imagine anyone would dare interrupt their collective trance by singing.

Pelican are about to release two split EPs, one with the Olympia, Washington instrumentalists Growing (a joint venture between Hydra Head and Kranky) and one with Floor, a sludgecore outfit who let the side down by recruiting a singer. For their part, De Bruyn believes Pelican's lack of vocals has worked in their favour. "We just did the instrumental thing because that's what we had," he asserts. "There were four of us, none of us really wanted to sing, and we had these stretched out, jammy songs, so we were like, 'This is fine without a singer'. But it really does make a huge difference. So many people who are turned off by Metal, it's really the vocals that do it. People can't relate to that style of singing. When they listen to music, it's usually the vocals that they relate to, and if they hear somebody who's just screaming and it's really harsh and unpleasant, then it's gonna turn them off."

Pelican's hometown success puzzles and pleases De Bruyn in equal measure. "The biggest surprise about this band," he concludes, "is that we've been able to bring in people from lots of different scenes to our shows. So when we're headlining bills, we try to bring in as many bands as possible, because we want to break down that whole scene segregation thing that's been plaguing Chicago since I got into playing music here." □ *Australasia* is out now on Hydra Head

Heavy music has always been about the rhythm section. On Black Sabbath's first six albums, bassist Geezer Butler and drummer Bill Ward achieved an almost jazzy interplay at the eye of the storm, and their lessons haven't been lost on succeeding generations of amplifier worshippers. Today, Metal derived acts like Neurosis, Isis, Cult Of Luna and others have almost entirely stripped the guitar solos out of their songs in favour of complex percussive interplay and low end drones.

Now Chicago quartet Pelican have gone one step further and eliminated another crucial Metal trope: the vocals. Dispensing with high-pitched screams and demons grunts, the group are entirely instrumental. On their untitled debut EP and their first album, *Australasia* (both on Hydra Head), they've created a sound that incorporates both Prog and post-rock, even as it's clearly inspired by the rhythms of Doom Metal. "When we write the songs," explains guitarist Trevor De Bruyn, "they come out of rhythmic motifs, and when we bring it to the band level, we do arrangements that are more melodically complex. I guess when we first started the bringing in of melody, it was more to mask not having a singer, but now it's more instinctual. We just structure our pieces in ways that are more melodic."

De Bruyn and fellow guitarist Laurent Lebec form the core of the quartet, along with drummer Larry Mullen. The three of them have been together about two years, not only as Pelican but also as three quarters of the progressive grindcore group Tusk, who have two albums of their own — *Get Ready* and the forthcoming *Tree Of No Return*. "We're trying to bridge the gap

between early '70s Yes and *Discordance Axis*," De Bruyn says of Tusk. Yes? "Relayer doesn't get much respect, but it's so incredibly tech," he raves. "Steve Howe's work on the electric sitar — forget it, that stuff is so tight."

"Obviously, everything about grindcore is very compressed," he continues, explaining how Pelican evolved out of Tusk. "So we wanted to do something where we could flex our instrumental muscles a little bit more, slow down and create more space in our music. When we first started, we were into a lot of doomier stuff like Sleep and Boris from Japan. The more we worked together, though, we started to bring a psychodelic thing into it, playing around with guitar effects and things like that." They enlisted Lebec's younger brother Bryan on bass, and began playing local shows, eventually recording the four track EP that was picked up and reissued by Hydra Head.

The EP is clearly influenced by second generation Doom Metal groups, who elected to play even slower and lower than their masters Black Sabbath. At the same time, its rhythms are tricky, frequently making incremental shifts that sound wrong, forcing the ear to adapt on the fly. A very grindcore trick is for groups to play one riff for no more than ten seconds before changing. "We like the idea of pulling the ground out from underneath the listener," comments De Bruyn. Australasia, by contrast, is a less oppressive, amorphous record, even featuring acoustic guitars on a few tracks. Where the absence of a vocalist was sometimes felt on the EP, the album announces the group as a fully formed entity, with its own sound and agenda. This is where they better Blind Idiot God, who tried this same

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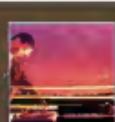
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# GLOBAL EAR: PHNOM PENH

A survey of sounds from around the planet.

This month: In the Cambodian capital, David Crosbie observes an artistic community absorbing a wealth of influences after the oblivion of the Pol Pot regime.



Left to right: Cambodian shadow theater; Sophiline Cheam Shapiro's *Seasons Of Migration*; American jazzman Beau Shivers

In the beginning there was nothing. A period of extreme agrarian communism in Cambodia, executed between 1975-79, left a third of the country's population dead, a greater proportion than any other terror regime of the 20th century. The chief architect of this rural dystopia, Pol Pot, forced a city of just under a million inhabitants into the countryside, destroying all remnants of literature, religion, music, and history and banishing any exchange of ideas. Phnom Penh became an abandoned urban landscape, one of dreams and nightmares, for those who chose to remember. For a country which is now finding its identity on the world stage, the arts can provide an open door of opportunity for people to explore and understand their history, nationhood and identity.

In the absence of formal venues or professional musicians, a confluence of primitive styles has forced music to return to the streets. Beggars accompany their pleas on the two-stringed *tro ou*. Countless street hawkers yell out their trades in an apocalyptic voice, and ceremonies for the deceased and the newly wed in this consolidated Buddhist town impose lingering elegiac or euphoric moods in the streets for days before and after the event.

However, the absence of professionalism, structure and knowledge in music has allowed for some intriguing revivals. In 1994, Delphine Kessen co-founded Sovannava Phum, an arts foundation dedicated to nurturing and resurrecting Khmer arts including music, classical dance, spoken, singing and shadow forms of theatre, and even the circus. It was set up as an outlet for the city's talents, who "had nowhere to perform in Phnom Penh".

Theatre founder and director Mann Kosal emphasises the difficulty of developing "a dead art form" such as shadow theatre, which was lost after 1979, when 90 per cent of all known artists were killed during the regime. Today, 80 professional artists are employed and weekly performances usually sell out to tourists, expatriates and locals, with street kids eagerly filling the aisles. This public presentation of the improvised and traditional sound of pinpeat music (whose origins are linked strongly with Indian Hinduism), composed of hand drums, flute, cymbals, xylophone and the *tro ou*, has created a foundation for the population to identify Khmer musical heritage. This amalgamation of art and music was recently enjoyed at South London's London International Festival of

Theatre (LIFT) in 2003.

*Seasons Of Migration*, choreographed by Sophiline Cheam Shapiro (a returnee Khmer from the United States) and her husband John Shapiro, has subjected a classical dance performance to the experience of culture shock. Though classical dance has evolved, the music has retained the pinpeat style; as the symbolism changes, the structure of the music is left static and therefore meaningless. Shapiro has attempted to re-evaluate this problem, not only in dance but through music. In collaboration with composer Chhunang Ung, another returnee from North America, she aims to write a modern piece for an almost completed production, combining aspects of both pinpeat and Western classicism. As John Shapiro points out, "The reasons for introducing change were thematic. We were not imposing change for the sake of change. By bringing in a contemporary experience and applying this to a traditional art form it becomes relevant to Khmer society."

In pre- or post-communist times it has been the objective of the satirist to reflect on their society. As Phnom Penh currently sits with an unresolved government and political assassinations continually threaten the stability of a fragile democracy, satirical reflection of the state is never more pertinent than now. The French Cultural Centre's recent presentation of a style known as *ayay* was one example of this. Husband and wife team Moung Sovann and Umm Lay Sim combine tradition with a multitude of styles to express a parody of society, pushing against taboos in the process.

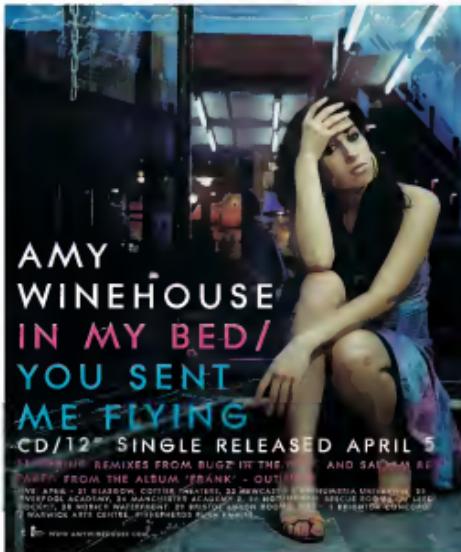
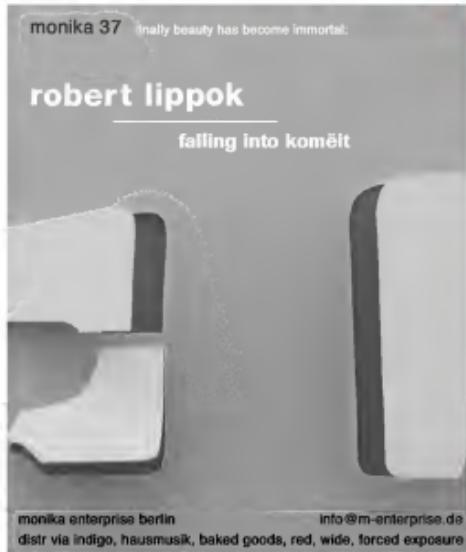
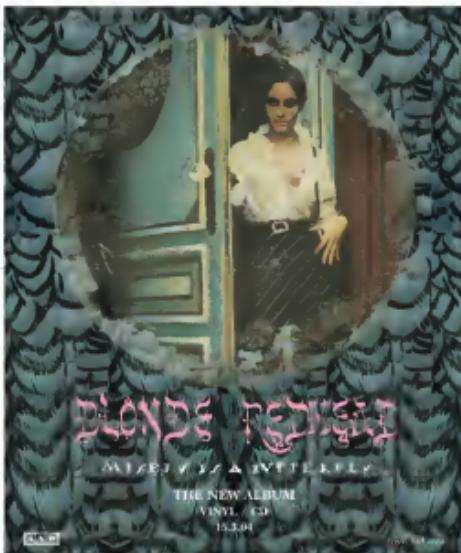
Lyrics are replaced with the spoken word. Rather than using encoded language particular to classical dance, *ayay* is delivered in a direct, succinct and often coarse language. Notably, the singers refrain from soliloquising, instead preferring to use dialogue and humour to create momentum. Whereas classical dance kept music in the background, its symbolism transmitted through the hand movements of the dancers, *ayay* places the pinpeat sound more into the middle. Consequently dance, comedy, satire and theatre are placed in the foreground. The informality of the movements and severity of the instruments stretch the role taken by the music into an entirely different medium.

Cross-cultural experimentation is also beginning to diversify. A Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)

called Salpot Khmer Amatok (SKA) has brought the last surviving musicians from the provinces to teach Western artists Khmer instruments and styles. Yim Sang, the country's foremost *chloy* (high and low pitched flute) player, only survived the Khmer Rouge regime by declaring he was a hairdresser and not a musician. To prove it the following day he was asked to cut the hair of 1,000 soldiers. Now he's teaching Beau Shivers, one of four US jazz musicians under 20 years old who together are attempting to incorporate the teachings of their Khmer professors into their fusion sound. The result is a compelling fusion of macabre bass, rolling around the exotic swirls of the *chloy*, creating an energised duo beat. "Music is inclusive, and we want to move away from the traditional indigenous sounds," states Shivers. But, as Eli Carlton Persson, a guitarist learning the *tro ou*, points out, "The difficulty is in the unique Khmer scale which becomes increasingly complex, with tonal levels being varied and improvised."

Conversely, as external influences are brought carefully to these native sounds, the insatiable demand from the city's young market for Khmer (and sometimes Western) HipHop, emanates from the Cambodian ghetto of Long Beach, California – the highest concentration of Khmers living outside of Phnom Penh. One of the most popular albums of last year was a black market copy of *Dolama* by Frach Ly, a refugee Khmer now residing in Long Beach. The album questions the long term suffering caused by wars, displacement and famine of the Cambodian people. The sentiment is echoed by other expatriate Khmers such as Seasia who have now begun to work on collaboration projects as part of the Cambodian Masters Performers Programme, held by the SKA organisation.

As the Cambodian economy enters into the hegemonic global rule of the WTO next year, the oppression and future of the poor remains ambiguous. But, for those involved in the arts, and to consider their history, it's unlikely that an economic treaty will seriously prevent what is becoming an emerging local movement. As Mikhail Bulgakov wrote in response to the events surrounding Stalinism and the ensuing erosion of freedom and intelligence in the 1930s, "memorise. don't burn." □ [www.welcometo.sovannavaphum.com](http://www.welcometo.sovannavaphum.com) (SKA), [www.mjmusic.com](http://www.mjmusic.com) (Frach Ly)



# INVISIBLE JUKEBOX

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they are asked to identify and comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. This month:

# LUC FERRARI

Tested by Dan Warburton. Photos by Anna Schori





Born in Paris in 1928, Luc Ferrari studied piano with the legendary Alfred Cortot, analysis and composition with Olivier Messiaen, and during the 1950s was a frequent visitor to that hotbed of European post-war serialism, the Summer School in Darmstadt, Germany, where he befriended the major composers of the day - Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luigi Nono, Luciano Berio, Henri Pousseur, Mauricio Kagel and Pierre Boulez. After working with *musique concrète* pioneer Pierre Schaeffer, in 1958 he was one of the founder members of the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM), with François-Bernard Mâche, François Bayle and Bernard Parmegiani. In the early 1960s he became director of the Ensemble Instrumental de Musique Contemporaine de Paris, conducted by Konstantin Simonovic, and also made several films on New Music for television with director Gérard Petris.

Landmark electronic works such as *Hétérozygote* (1964) and *Music Promenade* (1969) moved away from the ideological dogma of early *musique concrète* towards a mature style that welcomed the inclusion of field recordings and sounds of everyday life, most notably in the epochal *Presque Rien* (1970), which captured the sound of daybreak in a small fishing village on the Dalmatian coast. Ferrari's oeuvre has recently been enthusiastically rediscovered by a younger generation, notably David Grubbs (who has released three CDs of the composer's music on his Blue Chopsticks imprint), which has led to several collaborations with contemporary electronica artists like DJ Olive, Erik M and Otomo Yoshihide.

The Jukebox took place in Ferrari's spacious studio in Paris, two days before the composer set off on another gruelling concert tour to Italy, Germany and Belgium.

## OLIVIER MESSIAEN

### CHRONOCHROMIE

FROM KOECHLIN/BOULEZ/MESSIAEN (EMI CLASSICS) 1980

I think I know what this is. It's Olivier Messiaen. Probably *Quatuor Exotiques*.

**No, but there are plenty of birds in it though...**

There always are. Which piece is this?

**It's the opening of *Chronochromie*.**

I like the pieces from that period a lot. It's later on that he spoiled it. He trapped himself up trying to sound like Messiaen and it became a bit repetitive. **Why was Messiaen such an important influence on his students, your generation?**

Because he was one of the first people to talk about contemporary music in the conservatoire, which was something because they usually stopped at Debussy and Ravel. Suddenly there was this guy – not even a professor of composition but a professor of analysis – who analysed all the scores that we, as students, had no access to. There were no records of this music available at the time, remember, and we didn't have the scores, but he did. He helped us discover what contemporary music was. He was a very pleasant guy. I'm no mystic and I'm certainly not religious, and his mystical religious side was a bit of a problem for me, but I knew that what I was learning was very important.

## TOD DOCKSTADER

### NO 2

FROM EIGHT ELECTRONIC PIECES (SUCCHI) 2006 BBC 1961

Must be about 1960. It sounds like Pierre Henry, but I know it isn't. It's not Stockhausen – not rigorous enough – it's not Beno, because I know his stuff very well, it's not Ligeti because he only did one [electronic] piece, *Arikulation*, and that's not Pousseur. I don't know. **It's not European**.

American, then. It's not Ussachevsky, it's not Bebe Barron... who is it?

**Tod Dockstader, from a 1961 Folkways album.**

Wow, I don't know him at all!

**He's a self-taught composer who stopped composing at the end of the 1960s.**

He stopped? That's interesting, because this is very original. It's certainly not *musique concrète*. There's very little studio source sound, a little prepared piano, but not much. There are a lot of pure electronic sounds. It doesn't sound like anything else from that period.

**How did you meet Pierre Schaeffer?**

I met his daughter Marie-Claire, who was a beautiful girl, at an exhibition opening in an art gallery, and we started talking about music. I said I liked Varèse and Messiaen and told her I'd been at the first *musique concrète* concerts a few years earlier and she said, 'I have to introduce you to my father!' So Schaeffer came to one of my piano recitals, where I was playing scores by people who weren't very well known, including my own, and he seemed happy that I wasn't really writing serial music – though I was right in the middle of my serial period – happy that I'd somehow escaped serialism. He invited me to the studio to work with him, but I wanted because I had a lot of instrumental music to finish, and some concerts in Germany, and I went to him about two years later at the end of 1967.

**Did you enter into the ideological polemic between French *musique concrète* and German *elektronische Musik*?**

No, the ideological differences didn't interest me, but that was the spirit of the times. Pure electronic music didn't interest me much either. I've always avoided stereotypes. I've always preferred to work with instruments and tape – I like that superimposition. I don't like all the labels either: electronic, electric, experimental, acousmatic, as François Bayle calls it... Nowadays we call what the young composers are doing electronic. I just call it electro [laughs].

## MAURICIO KAGEL

### TRANSICIÓN II

FROM MAMONOV (WYNDHAMHOUSE MODES) 1989

I don't know that at all. There's a live piano and maybe a recorded piano. Maybe two pianos. There's some electro. It's definitely by someone influenced by Webern and the Second Viennese School. End of the 1950s, Darmstadt period.

**There's just one pianist, with a percussionist playing the inside of the piano, if that gives you a clue.**

There's a Cagean element to it. Could it be David Tudor?

**No, it's by a friend of yours...**

[Looks at CD] Non Ça alors! It's very good! I would never have guessed. Maybe it's the modern recording. I first met Kagel in 1958 at the Expo in Brussels, where there were concerts of New Music, both electronic and instrumental. He'd just arrived from Argentina, and we became close friends. When he came to Paris he stayed at my place, and when I was living in Berlin in 1967 he used to come and sleep on our sofa. His legs hung over the edge because he was so tall.

**You're often associated with Kagel, because neither of you try to hide your sense of humour.**

A sense of humour was very important at the time, as a way of getting away from the purely instrumental. Kagel was one of the first to venture into music theatre, into what we can do theatrically with musicians, their gestures, the way they behave. It was very funny, I think at that time he was influenced by Cage, and so was I, but I became more interested in making music with actors, rather than making theatre with musicians. I wanted to escape from pure music – and from music theatre too – to work with texts, using the voice, not as in opera, but as a spoken element, using texts of my own.

**What are your memories of Darmstadt?**

I was terrified when I first went to Darmstadt. In 1952 and saw all these houses in ruins. Germany was destroyed. I'd seen the war as a kid, and my memories of wartime as a child were extremely violent. I think that violence, that energy spilled over into the serial polemic – but it was a positive energy. It was there I met Nono, Maderna, Berio, Stockhausen, Boulez a little. I was there in 1957, when Cage arrived. That was wonderful. He was someone who stepped outside norms and he showed us that serialism was already academic. He was a serious guy, and thought a lot about what he was doing, but when he performed his pieces with Tudor it was fantastic. Everybody laughed. Except Boulez, [laughs].

## CECIL TAYLOR

### "STUDENT STUDIES PT 1"

FROM THE GREAT PARIS CONCERT (BLACK LION) 1988

Cecil Taylor. It's very very good. Not very well recorded, though. [Looks at CD] 1966... Jimmy Lyons, Andrew

Cyrille and Alan Silva. That was the line-up when I met them and made the film. I made a series of television films with Gérard Patris called *Les Grandes Répétitions* in 1965 and 66. It was the first time contemporary music had appeared on television. We started with a concert of Messiaen's *Et Expedita Resurrectionem Mortuorum in Chartres cathedral*. Messiaen nicknamed us "Drièse et Bémol" (Sharp and Flat) – "Here come Drièse et Bémol!" Then a homage to Varèse, just around the time when he died. We missed him by a few days. We did a portrait of Varèse, with Marcel Duchamp in New York. We did Stockhausen's *Momente*, a portrait of (conductor) Hermann Scherchen, and then Patris mentioned this great, revolutionary free jazz pianist called Cecil Taylor. We rented a big apartment in the Place des Vosges in Paris. It was empty and a bit dirty, but we put a piano in there and that's where we made the film. It lasted 35 minutes. What he played was fantastic, and nothing to do with contemporary music.

Do you think so? I find his work with pitch and rhythmic cells quite close to serialism at times. Yes, there was a strong sense of form and logic to his work but at the same time he let himself be carried away by the violence, the revolutionary spirit of the period. Did Taylor's pianism influence your own writing for the instrument? There are some pretty vicious clusters in *Und St. Weiter* [for piano and tape], which you composed that same year.

I never consciously set out to imitate Taylor's pianism in my work, but nobody's made of wood, you know – we're all influencible. I didn't have the same sense of revolution. I remember asking him what he thought of Cage and he replied, "He's not from my community." I realised he knew things I didn't.

Where is that film now?

It's in the INA archives somewhere, I haven't even got a copy of it. INA is pretty inaccessible, you know what French administration is like. It would be nice to see it again, though.

#### ROBERT ASHLEY

"PURPOSEFUL LADY SLOW AFTERNOON"  
FROM AUTOMATIC WRITING (LOVING MUSIC) 1964

Louise Anderson?

A bit before – it's not the composer speaking. I don't know. [Looks at CD] Ashley, of course! Oh, if you'd played "She Was A Visitor" I would have got it. I met Bob Ashley in 1970. I wanted to make a series of films like the ones I'd made in Europe, and I went to the States on a fact-finding mission. The project turned out to be too complicated and too expensive, but I got a free trip out of it and met a lot of great musicians, including Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Ashley, who was at Mills College at the time. I was familiar with the work of the Sonic Arts Union. I like Alvin Lucier a lot. I didn't know Ashley worked much with women's voices – in his operas he's the one who does the speaking. What little I understand I like very much, that rather Cageian approach of telling stories of quite ordinary things, but slightly twisted, bordering on the surreal.

Have you ever been tempted to write an opera?

I've done things that I consider operas. *Les Chansons Pour Le Corps* (1994) and another one that hasn't been recorded called *Cahier Du Soir* (1992), for an actress, 14 instrumentalists and slide projections. The actress tells a story about what's happening in the



piece but never speaks directly to the orchestra. It's a kind of dialogue without communication, and what she says about the music isn't true. [Laughs] There are fake employees, Cage-like observations that have nothing to do with the music, even erotic poems. *Ashley's operas were conceived for television. It's a shame that the Europeans, who probably have more money for such projects, have never exploited the medium to the full.*

Yes. A few years ago he could have done something along those lines in Germany. Not today though.

## JOHN CAGE

ETCETERA  
FROM THE ORCHESTRAL WORKS VOL 2 (MOOD 1979)

John Cage? [looks at the CD] It's called *Etcetera?* You once nominated *the late Cage* orchestral piece as one of your all time favourite discs.

Yes. Seventy-four, I think it is. One of his last works. It's absolutely fabulous. It lasts an hour with images projected on a screen and instrumentalists playing sustained sounds, it's a very beautiful adventure in sound. But this piece is very interesting – there's a fantastic openness of language, with those little clarinet melodies, and those noises in the background. There are little loops that remind me of what I was doing in *Tatoulogies* 3.

Arnold Schönberg described Cage not as a composer but as an inventor. Would you agree?

For me he was a composer. In any case, I have quite a wide definition of what composition is. When you're a composer, everything you do is composition. Whether it da Hörspiel or an installation, it's all composition. I think that the Cage who did his graphic scores in the 1950s was just as much a composer as the man who wrote the *Sonatas* and *Interludes* [for prepared piano]. You have to be really good to do something that stands the test of time while being different each time, like the *Concert For Piano And Orchestra* – which I love. That for me is the mark of a great composer's thinking and sensibility. I've been very influenced by Cage but nothing I do ever sounds like his music. I have my little chance operations, things I cultivate like a little garden, and I do what I want with them. Cage wasn't dogmatic either – some of his aleatoric works present musicians with a lot of latitude, others very little. I like the English expression 'by chance' – in French of course 'chance' means luck. That's great.

## GASTR DEL SOL

'THE SEASONS REVERSE'

FROM CANOLEUR (DAMING 1996)

It must be David [Grubbs], but I've never heard him playing with drums as loud as that. Which album is this? I like the fact that you can hear a lot of strong noise when David plays the guitar. But those drums... [makes a face]

It's the first track from the final *Gastr Del Sol* album, with Jim O'Rourke.

Ah, Jim O'Rourke. He came to visit *Le Musé En Circuit* [the studio Ferran founded in 1982] a long time ago, and he seemed to be so timid and in awe of me that he said nothing. And I was intimidated by his timidity. I met David when I was invited to a conference in Chicago six or seven years back, when he came up to me and said, 'I'd like to reuse *Tatoulogies* 3 and *Interuptrupt*.' Just like that. I was surprised and delighted that he knew those pieces that came out on vinyl so long ago, and we

became good friends. He's a very warm person and we have a great time together, even though I speak English like a Spanish cow, as we say.

**When did you first hear David play?**

That must have been at the Pompidou Centre, with [guitarist] Noël Akchoté and [saxophonist] Quentin Rollat. When David plays with Noël there's an amazing entente cordiale.

**You must be happy that younger musicians are discovering the music of your generation.**

It's wonderful, yes. I think there's a great curiosity on the part of these young ones for everything that came from the 1960s and 70s. First they got into the rock stuff, and then they moved on to electronic and concrete music, with Xenakis. The DJs were very interested in that.

**Talking of DJs, you've worked with several notable turntablists over recent years.**

Yes, though I don't go to see them in concert much. I'm not resistant enough to stand in a sweltering club with a bunch of 25 year old kids. I saw DJ Olive play at the Pompidou Centre [with Christian Marclay], and afterwards somebody introduced me to him. We started seeing each other and working together on a commission from the Ghent Festival called *Les Archives Sauvages Des Eaux*. I drew up a kind of score, a plan of action if you like, with dynamics marked and what have you, a kind of way of measuring time – as a composer I can't help measuring time – and for the performance, which lasted about 50 or 60 minutes, I played CDs, like a real DJ, and he did his turntables. I was terrified at first but I think I've made a lot of progress. I'm not as afraid as I used to be.

**You once said that what you liked about DJs was the gesture.**

Exactly. For me *musique concrète* is about gesture, an improvisation in front of a microphone, and afterwards playing with tape recorders in concert. It's also a gesture. I have problems with machines which aren't gestural. But now we're returning to the gestural, even with digital machines – I'm fascinated by the way DJs work with records, the directness of the gesture. I've worked with Erik M. Steinert, Martin Teubert and Otomo [Nobuo] because I saw him play once and it blew me away. I said, this guy's making *musique concrète* live, like we would have liked to do 45 years ago. I call these guys the *nouveaux concrètes* – they use machines with a real sense of experimentation. **Don't you think that the advent of new technology has made things too simple?**

Well I still have a hard time. I think it's good that these machines are available. The home studio is a great idea

– I created my first home studio back in 1970, with a

couple of tape recorders and not much else. I don't like machines that cost too much and do too much. As far as mics go, you don't buy them very often.

## NOËL AKCHOTÉ

'202'

FROM SNAPLE JOSEPH (RECTANGLE) 2001

That's the sound of today's electronic music. It's Noël, isn't it? I think I've got this.

**Tell us about your new career as an improvising pianist on the Blue Cheepicks CD *Impre-Micro-Acoustique*. Was that Akchoté's idea?**

No, no. David introduced me to Noël, who I'd seen play live at Les Instants Chavriés in Montreal, near where I live. I was fascinated by the way he played. After we

got to know each other I suggested we do something together, with percussionist Roland Auzet. To reassure myself I sketched out a kind of vague plan of action, which we didn't follow at all. We just went into the studio and it worked very well. I lost all my inhibitions. I play the piano, but there are lots of toys in there too. I also used the resonance of the piano itself, and worked with feedback. What we recorded was fed back into the studio through loudspeakers and we each had hand-held microphones so we could play with the loudspeakers at the same time. I've always loved feedback, and I've worked with it ever since I started making *musique concrète*.

**Are there any plans to tour with Auzet and Akchoté?**

Not in the immediate future. There's a concert on 6 April here in Paris at the Théâtre Silvia Monfort, with the world premieres of *Tatoulogies Et Environs* and *Presque Rien Avec Instruments*, in which I use what I call 'SM' [smiles mischievously]... that's 'Sons Mémoires' [laughs] – sounds recorded with Noël and Roland. But I'm really quite busy at the moment – it's funny to find myself onstage with these people three times as young as I am. It must look funny too. I'm having a great time, but I can't handle jetlag as well as they can.

## ERIC LA CASA & JEAN-LUC GUILONNET

### 'VENTS SUR ECOUSTES'

FROM FRANCE CULTURE AUDIO (PRÉTICE TAPE1 2000)

Well, I'd say it's after *Presque Rien* [laughs]. Les paysages sonores! soundscapes. I have no idea who it is.

**It's a recording of one of France Culture's Ateliers de Crédit Radiophonique, a piece by Eric La Casa and Jean-Luc Guilonnet with texts and music by other sound artists. There you heard a text by Chris Watson.**

The first radio piece I did was called *Portrait-Spiel*. It was commissioned by *Hörspiel SWF* in Baden-Baden in 1971. I think they asked me because they realised that the pieces I'd done before then, like *Hétérozygote* (1964) and *Music Promenade* (1968) and of course *Presque Rien No 1* (1970) were moving in that general direction. For me, *Hörspiele* have become something quite distinct from my concert works, because a *Hörspiel* is an opportunity to work directly with the voice, and with circumstances.

With *Portrait-Spiel* I recorded people in a local factory and a printing works, using the reporting technique to create a kind of autobiography in which I wasn't very present. It was a story I had lived, through my microphones, but at the same time a story of other people and other circumstances encountered along the way.

**It's not a simple unadulterated documentary though. Not at all. Once the field recording is finished, there's a lot of hard work to do in the studio. It takes me two months at least to produce a *Hörspiel*.**

**Presque Rien No 2 was undoubtedly a landmark.**

I don't know if it is or not. You could say John Cage had already done everything. But it was a continuation of what I was doing before, mixing electronic sounds and field recordings. *Presque Rien No 1* was a radical step in that I dispensed with the electronic sounds altogether. The people at SACEM [France's copyright authority] asked me about that. They said: 'Where's the music?' We had a lively debate. [Laughs] Nowadays they've got used to the idea, thankfully. □

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The kaleidoscopic fingerpicking style of Jack Rose picks up echoes of the almost vanished modalities of old time American roots music. But the exploratory sound the self-styled 'Dr Ragtime' perfected in his Improv group Pelt, refracted through drone minimalism, modernist bluegrass and free jazz, points to a renewal of energy in US free folk.

Words: David Keenan. Photos: Heather Leigh Murray

# RAMBLING ROSE



**Friday night is jam night** at Philadelphia Music Exchange and all the usual suspects are howling at the moon. There's Dan Balmer, legendary record collector and harmonica king (George 'Bullet' Williams, a cohort of Bukka White's from the 1920s and 30s, is his man); Chris Simpson, co-owner of the Exchange and full time Elvis evangelist, and Tony Nodges, long term employee, poster artist and owner of the Tequila Sunrise CD-R label. As the beers are passed round, Louisiana swamp rock deity and Elvis lookalike Tony Joe White is spinning on the turntable. For Jack Rose this is home from home. He's played live here several times, and the bins are lined with his solo recordings and LPs by his group Pelt. Regulars might know him best as Dr Ragtime, the old-timers persona he used as cover when he first began to wrestle with the proton forms of pre-war American song, feeling his way through tunes like "Old Country Rock", "Buck Dancer's Choice" and "Knoxville Blues". His own compositions, ferociously personal visions for acoustic guitar, are populated by the same American architecture, echoing with the long gone songs of itinerant bluesmen, ragtime musicians and dance orchestras who spoke in tongues too feral, crude or ecstatic ever to soundtrack a beer commercial. In Rose's conceptions, there's the same sense of inextricability, of prophecy and becoming, that characterised many of those early sides, but he has traded their vision of the New Kingdom or the Last Judgment for a glimpse of an equally mythic pre-1940s America, a vanished cultural landscape now locked in the grain of old 78s, its details obscured by decades of crackle and static. Drawing on his background in free noise and snakecharming, drawn as a member of the improvising ensemble Pelt, Rose channels the codes of pre-war blues into revitalising vibratory systems that pulse with organic modes, his slide work sounding like the brakes on a subway car, his non, kaleidoscopic picking style drawing constellations of repeating overtones that echo the all night flights of minimalist Terry Riley and Henry Flynt.

"Where I grew up in the suburbs there were a lot of local musicians who played in a local style," Rose relates. "So when I heard all of that old time stuff for the first time, it didn't fit on the America I was living in at all, it was like this alien music that affected me in some unexplainable way. It was mesmerised by it, like broadcasts from outer space."

"I mean, no one can actually play like that today," he insists. "No one can duplicate that whole pre-war sound. The famous 78s collector Jon Bussard has said this many times but there's a stopping point, a certain rhythm that only that era had and then it was gone. All that extreme syncopation that was also incredibly propulsive, a sound like two guitars at once. Moronically too, these guys would sing and it was real wayward, there was no perfect pitch or anything like that. Charley Patton would sing in ways that related to the music of India. In fact Indian rhythms are much the same as a lot of the blues rhythms that were used. But rhythms change and reflect the times, and the rhythm of our era is rock. Occasionally, though, there are people who have a foot in each era. John Fahey was one of them, he was able to get that old rhythm. When I play, I try to connect with the rhythm of pre-1942. I try to, but I can't quite pull it off, so it ends up somewhere else, somewhere... inexpressible."

While Rose's take on steel string instruments certainly owes a debt to epoch-straddling modernists like John Fahey, all of his work bears his own thumbprint, possessed of the same kind of devouring energy that he gives off in the flesh. "For me, solo acoustic performance has become the final frontier," he says. "It's just you, wrestling with an instrument. I love that. When I'm there alone playing the guitar, I'm focused on trying to be myself completely, trying to react as myself to every movement and also trying to incorporate inspirational material the way Fahey did, to drop in tributes to people that I like but in such a way that it's never overt, I like to keep it hidden, subliminal, because I want to focus on my own voice, and that's the most difficult thing. For a while I thought I sounded like a second rate Fahey, I had to really work my ass off. He casts a huge shadow."

Rose's two solo albums to date, 2002's *Red Horse*, White Mule and 2003's *Opium Muley*, were both originally released as limited edition LPs on Eclipse, but they've now been bundled on one CD by Beautiful Happiness in the UK and VnF in the States) as *Two Originals Of Jack Rose*. Together they add up to one of the most significant documents of contemporary steel string technique, showcasing the leaps that Rose has made across six and 12 string and 10g guitars. It opens with "Red Horse", a melancholy blues unweaving a river of singing steel that references the 20s preacher Rev AW NX in a sunburst of wood and wire, and ends in the rolling waves of "Black Pearls", a beautiful homage to the waterways of the Mississippi and the turbulent music of John Coltrane. In between he runs off a bleak, introverted take on Blind Willie Johnson's "Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground", a beautiful series of duets with Pelt cohort Mike Gangloff on tampons and Cul De Sac's Glenn Jones on guitar, and a clutch of instrumental solo compositions.

"For me the whole fingerpicking thing took off when I was a kid and I got these two Country blues anthologies, *Country Blues Volume One* and *Two On Folkways*," Rose relates. "I had heard some kid next door who was visiting from Jersey and he was fingerpicking, and I asked what he was doing. He showed me this book, *Masters Of The Instrumental Blues Guitar*, and I went out and got my own copy. That's what turned me on to the Country blues records. Actually, John Fahey was in there too but I never paid any attention to him at the time because it was talking about him in terms of the new style of ragtime and because he wasn't an old black man, I never actually heard him until I'd been playing in Pelt for a year or two. I got an electric guitar as soon as I heard Led Zeppelin and began taking guitar lessons. My teacher somehow convinced me that there was money to be made playing electric blues so I gave up fingerpicking for ten years."

While attending high school in Fredericksburg, Virginia, Rose met Jason Bill, a one time member of the Texan psych group Charalambides and now half of fellow Eclipse recording artists Migrantes. Bill turned him on to experimental music and free jazz, introducing him to underground labels like Siltbreeze and Majon as well as groups like The Stooges and The Grateful Dead, the latter being a particular revelation in the way they expanded on the inherently elastic structures of old time music using bastardised avant garde techniques.

While attending college in Richmond, Virginia, Rose hooked up with Patrick Best as part of the post-hardcore group Uglyhead, both jumping ship for local maverick Pelt when the rest of Mike Gangloff's group cut him. "Pelt were doing songs when I first joined," he reveals. "Mike was absolutely into all that, things like Sonic Youth and Dinosaur Jr. Our first album, *Brown Cyclopedia* (1995), is mostly made up of stuff that we left over from the song-oriented days, although even within that context we were doing a lot of improving." But it was their second album, *Bumming/Plummet/Rocket* (1996), that saw the two fully raise the anchor, a vicious, all-improvised assault that occupies its own blasted universe somewhere between The Dead C's straight-to-cassette refusals and the Industrial strength electronics generated by Frop & Enzo circa *No Pussyfooting*.

"Back at the beginning of Pelt we had never heard stuff like AMM or anything," Rose says. "We were just interested in stretching and experimenting with sound, inspired by groups like The Dead C. It was really pretty spontaneous. It wasn't that deliberate. We were all just tired of simply doing song-based stuff." Most of the early Pelt recordings were live psychedelic blowouts, with Rose often manipulating two electric guitars at once, one pinned with twin Ebows set to elicit an eternally peaking drone, the other bowed through a range of delay. It wasn't until 2001's masterful double disc set *Ayahuasca*, dedicated to the late John Fahey, that the group began to more fully integrate acoustic elements, blurring open their repertoire in order to take in traditional Appalachian material like "The Cuckoo" and "Deep Sunny South" and assemble monstrous ragas from hypnotic combinations of fingerpicked guitars, singing bowls, bowed strings and whoo sounds like electrical discharges from the tails of comets. Meanwhile Pelt sprouted an offshoot in the form of Gangloff's Black Twig Pickers, a fiddle, banjo and guitar trio dedicated to furthering the tradition of "mountain ragas".

"Mike bought a banjo pretty early on in Pelt," Rose recalls. "He was getting heavily into old time music and then at a certain point both Mike and I moved to south west Virginia and started to really investigate the source of it all. It was Mike who got me into it but it wasn't easy. He kind of forced me to play in an old time band with him and his wife, and it was a really horrid experience. I hated playing that stuff. See this finger, how it's cut off right there? I had to get eight stitches in there. Soon after it happened, I'm playing old time music with these guys and with that type of music you gotta hold those chords down for a really long time. My finger would be in total pain, so one of the reasons I started fingerpicking again was that I was trying to figure out a way to open tunings while playing these old time tunes, just to ease the pain really. Mike had been interested in incorporating a lot of old time music into Pelt for a while, and at first Pat and I were resistant to it but finally we connected when *Ayahuasca* came out. We did a couple of old folk tunes on there and they were just the worst recording sessions for me, really awful. The atmosphere of the recording studio was terrible and Mike was encouraging me to fingerpick again, but what I was hearing in my head just wasn't coming to my hands. It was hell."

"Basically, I didn't think my skill level was up to what it should be," he confesses. "I knew if I wanted to be

good at it I couldn't work, I'd have to stop working, and just focus on that. Next thing was, I lost my job, so that's exactly what I did. The *Ayahuasca* sessions took about two years and it was just before they were finished that I lost my job, October 2000. My girlfriend and I went to France for a vacation, I picked up her brother's guitars and messed around and thought, you know, maybe I should really do something with this unemployment. Make use of it. So I did."

By this time Rose had finally encountered the music of John Fahey and Robbie Basho, as well as minimalist composer Terry Riley, all of which fed up the loose musical strands that had been flapping between his ears for so long. "Pelt had always been interested in Indian music and all that stuff," he explains, "so I had been trying to find a way to incorporate Indian style music into finger picking guitar. I was listening to a lot of Sun City Girls records at the time and getting inspiration from them, but there wasn't really any model for that sort of thing. Then I discovered John Fahey's 1973 album, *Far Forward Voyager*, and it seemed like it was all laid out there for me, like a blueprint. For so long I thought that entire record was improvised, when it actually isn't, and it really blew my mind that he could have come up with all that on the spot. Terry Riley was another interesting connection that helped sort of things for me," he continues. "I was listening a lot of his stuff too, I mean, he and Fahey had no contact with each other, but I really became obsessed with the two of them and the musical relationship between them. I began to work on a Riley-esque way of playing, further exaggerating Fahey's use of repetition. To me they really sounded very similar and somewhere between the two of them there was Robbie Basho."

The music that Robbie Basho recorded for labels like Takoma, Vanguard and Windham Hill between 1965-81 is a profound body of work that wedds American primitive traditions with Eastern modal drone and a supremely benign worldview. For a long time Basho existed in the shadow of the considerably more emphatic Fahey, but there's been a critical rethink in recent years, with players like Glenn Jones and German guitarist Steffen Basho Junghans (who went so far as to adopt Robbie's surname as a creative talisman) lining up to testify to the gangbusters reach of his guitar conceptions. "The way Basho played was very different to Fahey," Rose insists. "He seemed more expressive and opened up. With a lot of Fahey's stuff, if you try to play something that even vaguely references it, his personality just completely takes it over, you can't escape from it. Stylistically it's so specific, so locked in on itself, whereas Basho's playing is so open and wide. When Pelt were investigating all the drone stuff and the modal stuff it was definitely coming more from Basho than Fahey, great expansive pieces like *Song Of The Station* (1971). That was a record that really blew me open. The way Basho played, his songs just seem so intensely personal."

"He was never as announced as Fahey," he continues, "and I think that's what Fahey was trying to work against in his later recordings. Maybe he saw that in his own music as well. Maybe that's why he didn't like Basho, I don't know. Fahey was very aware of what he was projecting, whereas Basho was considerably more clueless. Fahey had all this 'who has the biggest dick?'





macho type thing that he picked up from the blues. Listen to parts of *Rare Forward Movements*, the alternate bass is so hammering, the whole repetitiveness, it's as exaggerated as anything by Led Zeppelin."

As the various pieces of the puzzle came together, Rose sold all his electric equipment and instead invested in a lap steel and two acoustics, while Gengloff bolstered his collection of banjos with a National steel guitar, a bunch of ethnic drone stringed instruments and an array of esoteric percussion, while Best focused on his new box cello, a gift from Bortkiewicz's Donald Miller. "With every record we have stripped down the amount of effects," Rose declares. "Even on the last electric stuff we did, I didn't use any effects at all. The only electrical things were things that I put on top of the guitar. I might have used a delay on occasion, but Paul had a sampler delay and sometimes we'd get a little too happy on it and we'd tell each other, 'You better stop doing that', it's better to have as little as possible between you and the person you're trying to communicate with. On our last record, *Peaks From The River*, I feel that I fully integrated my own solo music with the Peat idea of creating one unified sound. I'm playing the same kind of things that I play on my own, but because there's three of us I can't obviously play full out – it'd take up too much space. So instead I focus on getting right inside the whole drone of the thing. It's all the same well of inspiration, I guess."

In 2003 Rose finally felt confident enough to cut a solo disc. A friend from Fredericksburg, Mike Chaffin, who owned Apple Music, the store where Rose bought his first guitar, had offered to record him as soon as he was ready. He went in with a few semi-developed themes and improvised the rest, cutting his glowing version of "Dark Was The Night" even though he had only ever played it once. "I figured it out one day a couple of weeks before I was going to go record and then left it so it wouldn't be stale when I recorded it," he gmins. "I happened to get lucky, put it that way. I just got lucky." For Rose it was like going full circle, back to the music that had first inspired him as a kid. "I mean, that's the first stuff I listened to. I was 12 or 13 when I got into that," he marvels. "I didn't get into punk rock until I was 18, I grew up 50 miles south of DC, I never heard any of that Discord stuff until I got to college. It was a really isolated area, all classic rock, instead I grew up with this folk music."

Still, he's quick to dissociate himself from any historic folk tradition. "It's stuff that I like and what I listen to, obviously," he admits, breaking off to proudly display a photograph he's discovered of himself in Joe Bussard's basement, the two of them marvelling over a Robert Johnson test pressing. "It would be really egotistical of me to say I'm following in a tradition," he concludes. "I'm just a guy, but if people perceive me as following in that tradition, good. Sure, I don't know. To me The Devil's, that's folk music, or Sun City Music. The whole term folk music is a broad definition, I don't know if I ever thought of myself as playing folk music, although that's what I happened to grow up listening to. But the things that affected me just as much were groups on small labels like Migras and Siltbreeze in the 90s, people like Un and Dadadom. To me that's just as much where I come from. That's my folk tradition." □ *Two Originals Of Jack Rose* is out this month on Beautiful Happiness (UK) and VnF (USA)



# THE IKONOKLAST SAMURA

Since his early 80s Bronx classic "Beat Bop", artist, rapper and Gothic Futurist Rammellzee has been engaged in a literal war of words against the forces of authority and capital. In this rare interview, he introduces his stunning array of self-made armoured combat outfits, outlines the medieval origins of his complex philosophy of animated letters and looks back at his youth spent paintbombing the subway.

Words: Greg Tate. Photos: Kareem Black





Reverente and his Gothic, Postapocalyptic Brilliance in his Tribeca apartment, February 2005

**Once upon a time in the Bronx**, before HipHop had a name, or came to be defined by the Five Elements of MCing, breakdancing, B-boying, turntablism and the painting known as graffiti, it had Writers. These scribes wrote on the trains of New York's subway system. Mostly they wore their names, a host of colourful noms de plume. They rendered bold abstractions of the alphabet in spraypaint and magic marker, causing the letters to inflate like gaseous bubbles and explode outwards with multidirectional arrows. If any figure appeared, it would be cartoon characters and caricatures of the Writers themselves. At their most ambitious and epic, these Writings covered entire carriages from top to bottom, including the windows. Outside the culture, these mobile murals were seen as more 'graffiti'. Within the culture, the act of writing on the trains was synonymous with 'bombing' them.

As the name implies, bombing was an aesthetic form of urban terrorism. Since bombing involved defacing and vandalising city property, it was also considered a crime by the authorities, so much so that those powers eventually put barbed wire, attack dogs and undercover cops in the trams to foil rands on the carriages during Gotham's graveyard shift. It took the city a decade of aggressive policing, and a new line of Writing-proof trains made in Japan, to drive Writers away from the system forever.

In its heyday (roughly 1970-85), Writing seemed a permanent fixture and an impressive feature of life in the city. At times the Writers functioned collectively, like a Renaissance guild, routinely exchanging ideas, techniques, energy and adrenaline for their consuming mission to 'bomb all lines'. Their efforts paved the way not only for HipHop as an artform but also for the scale of commodification and self-promotion that defines today's HipHop.

The originator of Writing is generally thought to be a Greek immigrant who made a name for himself around 1970 by plastering the walls of the metropolis with the tag 'Toku 183'. Inspired by his example, a family-like generation of alienated, disenfranchised youths in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Harlem began throwing their tags up on city walls. One day, some genius of ghetto self-promotion got the bright idea that if you really wanted to have your name seen around the city, why not throw it on the side of a parkland train car? By 1976 this idea was taken to its zenith by hundreds of crew writers who took up the challenge of trying to bomb as many as 18 cars in one night. Whole Gotham slept. Writing crews, sometimes in pairs or groups of up to 30 strong, executed their work in the yards and underground tunnels. If your fellow Writers considered your bombing beautiful, you had made a 'burner'. Those who couldn't produce burners were considered 'toys'.

There is another theory of Writing's origins which says it all began with the medieval monks of the 14th and 15th centuries, who produced illuminated manuscripts in the script we now call Gothic. In this version, the monks were prevented by the Catholic church because their letters had become so ornate that the Pope and his bishops could no longer read them.

This set of beliefs emanates from a gentleman and HipHop icon known to the world as Rammellzee.

To understand Rammellzee, especially for the uninitiated, it's best to begin with basic facts. Ramm

was born in 1960 in Far Rockaway, Queens. He began writing on the trains in the mid-70s, influenced by legendary Writers like Phase One and Dondi, who became something of a mentor. In 1980 he stopped writing on trains and, like many of his peers, began showing his paintings and sculptures in international galleries and museums. Around this time he began developing the notion that Writing was actually an act of war, a military assault he codenamed 'Gothic Futurism' or 'Iconoclast Panzerism'.

Fans of HipHop, and of the film *Wild Style*, first became aware of Rammellzee not as a theorist or a Writer but as an MC. In the film he freestyle-duels with his partner Shocked in the nasal bark he calls 'Gangsta Duck'. This performance is thought to have served as the template for the vocal styles of both The Beastie Boys and Cypress Hill.

In 1983, Tarnation Records, under the aegis of producer Jean-Michel Basquiat, released a 12" called 'Beat Bop' by Rammellzee Versus K-Rob, a one-off that immediately entered the canon of HipHop masterpieces. The song went on to become the unofficial theme song for the documentary *Style Wars*, the definitive statement about Writing culture that still stands as the most revelatory film about HipHop ever made. Strangely enough, Ramm doesn't appear in the original, though in the two disc DVD version he is discussed in detail by Dondi in an outtake and given his own exhibition space in one of the extra features. Ramm also appears in Jim Jarmusch's feature debut *Stranger Than Paradise*. In the original script for Julian Schnabel's *Basquiat*, there is a recreation of his rather infamous interrogation of Jean-Michel, brought on because he and other writers felt Basquiat had been unduly crowned king of graffiti painting by the art world despite having never sprayed a bumper up on the trains. The moody music that plays behind the two MCs on 'Beat Bop' is a sly, whimsical Ambient shuffle full of funk and suspense that creeps through your head like a slow moving ghost train. While K-Rob's lyrics detail urban corruption and misery in a subdued vocation on Grindmaster Flash's 'The Message', Ramm's oblique streaks of surreal verbiage suggest William S Burroughs doing cut-ups on acid. In the 80s Ramm recorded sporadically with Bill Laswell and Death Comet Crew. The latter joint presaged the dark, cinematic stylings RZA crafted for the Wu-Tang Clan by a decade. On Bi-Concavus Of The Remmellzee, released this month on German label Gamma, Ramm reunites with K-Rob and Shocked. The beats on Bi-Concavus, created by several different producers including Death Comet Crew and Munk, sound a bit too 1982 retro/electro/Planet Rock for my taste, but it's wonderful to hear Ramm return to recording. This is not to say the Bi-Concavus are not without zany lyrical charms: for example, when Ramm preaches the gospel of Gothic Futurism or duels with Shocked over living space on 'Pay The Rent'. Potentially more satisfying is a Japan-only CD, reportedly more dubwise in approach and mimicking the massive reward envelope utilised on 'Beat Bop'. Currently, however, there is no Western distribution for this, and label details could not be secured at press time.

For as long as I've known Ramm – going on two decades now – he has lived in a 2000 square foot

space in Tribeca, Lower Manhattan. The narrow, ramshackle building, situated a loading dock, has three floors. Flittingly, Ramm lives on the top; the mad monk in the attic. The crib's only window faces south. On 11 September 2001 he had a clear, elevated view of the Twin Towers' collapse from a distance of no more than 20 blocks.

Solid tall and rangy, though with the inevitable middle-age spread that 44 years can put on a brother, Ramm remains a man of mystery and profound contradiction. Yet he is not without appetites, a human history and a superhuman ego to complement his prodigious gift of gods. He loves his Old English BBO as much as the next gangsta rapper. 'Not because it gets me drunk,' he professes in his heartless Viking voice, 'but because it's beat!' Like his brethren among postmodern African-American apostles George Clinton, Sun Ra and RZA, you can take his playful philosophies as seriously as you want. He cracks up constantly. Ask him how he came to believe the Pope is the enemy of the letter and he'll guffaw, 'I don't know!' and mean it. He'll admit to being as mystified as anyone by the stuff that spontaneously exits his mouth. He never writes anything down and though he speaks of having derived his terminology from 'dictionaries', the only publications visible in his domicile are magazines with articles about him and a pornographic calendar I had to move aside before taking a seat on his couch. What you'll mostly find in his home is 25 years' worth of paintings (on canvas and carpet), sculptures (most prominently a four foot high gold painted replica of an Egyptian ankh symbol), costumes and toys. A profusion of spraypainted and glued metal artifacts made out of junk and skateboards salvaged from the scrapheap hang from the walls and the ceiling, taking up about two thirds of the room (the claims there is even more work in his mother's garage in Queens). A newer series features the letters of the alphabet rendered as three-dimensional Wildstyle transformer weapons on wheels. You can feel the sweat and the anal, outsider art obsessiveness that went into constructing all these pieces. They are in the vein of African power-sculptures, assemblages with hidden powers and meanings waiting to be activated by their builders and makers.

Ramm grew up in Far Rockaway, Queens, in a working class neighbourhood close to JFK Airport. He describes his family as mostly made up of 'cops and military police', with himself and a cousin (who did time in NYC's most infamous prison, the Tombs) as the criminal element. His infiltration into Writing's master level came via the legendary Dondi.

'I came down from Queens to the Bronx,' he reminiscences, 'because that's where the culture was coming from. All the guys who also ride the A Train – Phase Two, Peanut Two, Jester – all these guys influenced me in this manner of Writing. I used to cut out from school and meet other people who were toys. We were using flashlights with erasers and store-market ink. It would leak all over your pockets, but you could hit a train. 'Course, when you got home you got your beat because your pants were all fucked up. One day a guy heard me talking about writing on the train and he said, "I know Dondi". I hit the window right behind him to prove I was a Writer. I went to Dondi's house and he didn't want to let me in until this guy said, "No, he's great". I had a great time with Dondi for

**"I JUST FINISHED  
BUILDING A TANK THAT  
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about four or five years. Dondi saw something developing – he couldn't see how the idea of an arrow turning into a missile could have come from someone from Far Rockaway. [He thought] it should have [come from] somebody from the dead in the culture, from the hierarchy. I was far away, I shouldn't have those thoughts in my mind. If I'd been born in Brooklyn," he adds, "I wouldn't have come up with my style of Ikonoklast Panzerism. It would have been too close to too many masters."

"I was part of United Graffiti Artists along with everybody else," Ramm continues. "I was known as Stimulation Assassination: Tagmeister Killer. I owned the entire 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 lines. The letter music notes and weather notes that were done down there reached a point where you didn't need to kill a person. The piece itself became a weapon; the letter itself. So fame was the most interesting to take out. How do you know George Washington? You know him through a name. You shoot the letter on the train at the other name and it takes out that name. So therefore homeboy has no identity. Why should I kill him? He'll just be dead anyway because nobody will know who he is. He'll just be a walking zombie."

"Don't let him be dead," he asserts. "Because that's what they want to do to you. They sell your art, they sell your music and exploit it and then all you have left is exploitation. So why don't you at least have your own name? Give that to them and what do you have after that?"

Ramm believes that when Writing moved from the trains it gained the world's attention for 15 minutes but lost its soul. Not so much because the Writers got pimped and disposed of by the galleries but because, except for himself and the partners A-1, B-1 and C-1, the original Writing culture discontinued the path of amassing the letter and furthering the war they had started on the trains against a biologically diseased alphabet. As he told the online graffiti at 149th St. "We failed what could have been 'our culture'. Writing for fame or name is a poor excuse to be a monk and is the reason why this culture is a subculture. I went [to an exhibition] in 2000. Everyone who was anyone in this 'subculture' had works for sale. No one sold except for a few. I felt that the 'culture' died right there. There was too much moshmenism, not enough 'burner'! Our future! We should have stuck to our principles, left by the monks. We should have only stuck to doing 'the letter' and joined together to fight the light dwellers, but we will always be 'Kings from the Dark Continent'. It's hard to become a real live painting in B-boy style but I managed, and we all could have managed."

If you are fortunate enough to see Ramm perform, you will see him dressed in full body armour – mechanised costumes whose details and personae express his philosophy in visual form. In his heavy metal B-boy samurai gear, Ramm freestylets and cements, at times with a vocoder attachment which makes self-evident the connection between his Gangsta Duck delivery and George Clinton's Sir Nose D'Void Of Funk persona. Looking at these creatures arrayed in his apartment, I ask for a formal introduction to each one as Ramm walks down the line.

"These are gods called the Ramm El Zee," he

says. "Each one of them has a part to play in the mythology called Gothic Futurism. Some of them are from different time periods. The Purple People Eater over there is China, the Cosmic Bookie. We all gamble one way or the other. He places his bets with the Horrors, and the Horrors gamble galaxies. The Walker is dealing with Chronologica. He spins around and deals with Civilization. He has to deal with the bet called 'Woman Versus Man'. What he does is calculate all movement in the universe, or as I call them, the transverses. Ovalization, or the cosmic flush, is the same thing as when a wombman has her period. Times burns out as a cosmic flush called 'men o' pause'. This is a trick made by the clergy: Men versus Womb Man."

"There's Wind, she's a mother of natures. The one with the white beard and the pitchfork is a loan shark. He takes bets and hands them to the Horrors. There you have Deathly and Deathly, the double headed womb man. What they do is separate themselves like Adam and Eve."

"That brings us into the style of Gothic Futurism and the first two people, and their attitude towards an apple or orange. Anything round is silly because since space has no curvature and there's no down or up, the only thing that could actually represent that is a steeple. I believe the first spaceship is a steeple." Cosmology or mere child's play? You be the judge. Ramm don't care 'cause Ramm don't stop. I'll only say that every time I suspect he is putting me on, the scientific theory checks out.

For many, our first encounter with Ramm's militant and contentious body of thought came via the May 1983 issue of Artforum, a special edition about the future in which he was quoted at length by writer Edie Deak. Many of us weren't ready for this articulation of Hip-Hop's message. No matter how much we loved Writing, rapping, tumbling and breaking, and despite our ardour for the sight of a ten-camera-long series of burners unfurling from the tunnels during morning rush hour, Ramm had us scratching our heads in confusion and wonderment. He dropped knowledge that wasn't easy for the average biker to assimilate. In that issue of Artforum he not only revealed his philosophy of Writing's military function, but suggested he'd done the math, come up with a unified field theory of space-time, electromagnetism, biochemistry and mysticism.

"The monks started what we do," he told Deak. "We extend off their science. The bishops in 1582 stopped their knowledge because they couldn't read the monks' tax papers. They were getting too fancy so the bishops said 'I can't read this to tax the people'. If you look in the dictionary you'll see that the bishops stopped the monks because their power was becoming too strong with the letter. Those damn monks contradicted what the kings wanted. They wrote it the way they wanted to write it, in their style. The calendar monks sent a letter to the one place God cannot go: Hell. The light we had draws from a knowledge that was dim down there, so the knowledge was very faint but yet it was real, and with its energy passing through our bodies, we received it."

Composer and painter Danny Hamilton believes Writing stopped being interesting once it stopped being about

vandalism. To hear Ramm tell it, the essence of writing on the trains was all about taking something back – not Krylon spraycans from local art supply and hardware stores, but the alphabet itself, whose true symbolic nature was mathematical, not phonetic. Ramm believes our native tongue was imposed on the letter by our biologically diseased species, especially the Roman Catholic church. As Einstein did with his equation E=MC<sup>2</sup>, Ramm employs the letter as a standard for universal electromagnetic forces. Surrounding the Earth, the charged particles we know as the ionosphere determine the structure of every living thing, from the weather to DNA. Before the Writers on the trains were stopped, just like the monks before them, they were subconsciously ammuring the letter against exploitation and misdirection – hence the repeated imagery of arrows and missiles. Embazoned with these symbols, the trains became moving combat vehicles akin to the German tanks of World War Two: Ikonoklast Panzerism.

Rammillzee believes that information is encoded within the mathematical structure of the alphabet that will allow human beings to leave the planet ("this mould," as he calls it), freed from the demands of both the church and the human reproductive system. As long as science, religion and biochemistry are bound together, he believes human beings will be unfit for interstellar travel. Like Sun Ra and George Clinton before him (whom he acknowledges as conceptual forebears along with Gene Simmons of Kiss, AC/DC and the Hell's Angels), Ramm believes mankind's true home is among the stars. If that means we must all exchange flesh for robot parts to get there, he's cool with that.

In 1985 he told me, "Rammillzee is a military function formation... I am ramming the knowledge to an elevation and I am understanding the knowledge behind the Zee. Since we are dealing with Roman letters, we have to go back to the day when the Romans were using the ram to break down doors. Our situation today is to break down a door of knowledge hidden behind society. We're going to work our way around it instead of breaking it straight up. Whereas before you'd be trying to break through and you would be on the bottom of the pile. We're talking about where graffiti originated, where hardcore war went down, with missiles against markers and letters against letters. You think war is always shooting and beating, everybody up, but no, we had the letters fight for us."

"All my art and all my teachings are about Gothic Futurism," he continued, "and the knowledge of how a letter aerodynamically changes into a tank. I tell people phonetic value does not apply to any letter's structure because the sound is made by the bone structure of the human species, which has nothing to do with the integer structure quality. The letter is an Integer. Chinese letters are carbonitic, but ours are siliconic. Arabic symbols are disease – cultural chemical symbols. They cannot be ammured. They cannot be made Ikonoklast. They cannot be made into a vehicle in motion. Silicon based symbols can be moved forward and have no phonetic value. What they're saying in Arabic equals the structure of the symbol. What we're saying does not equal structure, but the difference in values between silicon and carbon."

HipHop evolved in a war zone within a society in love with its own firepower. The culture of Waging reflects the context and the pent-up aggression of its alienated, disenfranchised urban soldiers. "Our symbols could be armoured because this culture has military power," he says now. "Our generation's poverty and despondency made us turn a letter into a missile. Whereas the Japanese were more spiritual, they were 'peace peace peace' after they had a bomb dropped on their ass. The first act of terrorism was America dropping the bomb on Hiroshima."

Furthermore, he persists. "The letter appeared from the first dimension. The first dimension has total power over everything because it is total electromagnetic energy. It is an image by itself. No one controls the alpha-beta. If you drop the [last] 'a', it becomes alphabet. That's what they did, but is it total control or is that foolish control? Bigotry and the rest of that bullshit."

On Rammeltze's Website, you can download a formal paper expounding on these thoughts entitled "Iconic Treatise On Gothic Futurism". In a document strictly for the hardcore enthusiast with some basic gleanings of theoretical physics, Ramm lays out in great detail the knowledge and power he believes reside within the 26 structures of the alpha-beta, from A to Z. Although Ramm never calls a spade a spade or the white man the devil, at times you can feel his Afrocentrism seeping through his quantum intellect.

"There's a point where people will steal the idea of the ratio envelope, the number and the letter, combine it together and say since we own this, we own you," he says. "Numbers were stolen from India, brought up to the Arabic countries and they sabotaged it then. Zero was stolen from the Mayan Indians. We have this government that doesn't want you to remember alphabets, they want you to remember the alphabet. We're not going to speak their bullshit anymore. We want our own sound for the letter now. We want you to take the letter, put it in the computer and find the sound that emanates from that image which is called the aura of the letter. Do that and you get ultrasonics. Ultrasonic sound waves is what they're going to have soon. I'll probably be the first one to do it. I just finished building a tank that shoots ultrasonic sound – it's called a Weather Note. It's a metropostasizer. It controls the atmosphere. It also acts like a sonicail, points out the cloud projections, then shoots the cloud. Disintegration of clouds comes from radioactivity. Microwaves that shit and it puts out a sound burst that's too thick for the atmosphere. Depending on whether or not it's an iodine cloud, you reverse the polarity of that shit. Ultrasonics, instead of going at high frequency, goes at a high hum. And it gets trapped by heat and auto-emissions. It's similar to making a tornado."

Before dismissing Ramm's verbal confusions as the quasi-fascist fantasies of a robot fetishist, take note of a project of the US Department of Defence known as High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARP), based in Alaska. Its main installation consists of 360 72-foot antennae spread over four acres and fuelled by a rich reservoir of natural gas. HAARP's antenna towers are designed to beam radio-

wave radiation into the ionosphere, creating a charged particle buildup that can be directed towards specific targets on Earth. The disruptive electromagnetic pulse created by atomic explosions can now be accomplished with the music of the heavens. It is to the world of sound what nuclear bomb technology is to the atom.

At least 12 military/corporate patents have derived from HAARP research to date. US Patent #4686 605, held by HAARP scientist Bernard Eastlund, describes "Method and Apparatus for altering a region in the earth's atmosphere, ionosphere and/or Magnetosphere". HAARP technology has diverse weaponry uses – surveillance imaging, deep sea submarine communications, guided missile communications interference and, most alarmingly, human behaviour. According to geophysicist and US military advisor Gordon JF MacDonald, "Accurately timed artificially excited electronic strokes could lead to a pattern of oscillations that produce relatively high power levels over certain regions of the Earth. In this way one could develop a system that would seriously impair the brain performance of very large populations in selected regions over an extended period." By MacDonald's reckoning, "The key to geophysical warfare is the identification of environmental instabilities to which the addition of a small amount of energy would release vastly greater amounts of energy." The US Air Force, which oversees HAARP, says, "Electromagnetic systems would be used to produce mild to severe physiological disruption or perceptual distortion or disorientation. In addition, the ability of individuals to function could be degraded to the point where they would be combat-ineffective. Another advantage of these systems is that they can provide coverage over large areas with a single system. They are silent and countermeasures may be difficult to develop. One last area where electromagnetic radiation may prove of some value is in enhancing abilities of individuals for anomalous phenomena." Suddenly Ramm's symbolic sound-wave machines don't seem so far-fetched. If the government is out to play us with HAARP, Ramm's ideas beg that we at least prepare certain conceptual countermeasures. For all his anti-Christian warp and woof, graved arm guff, he ultimately reveals himself to be a utopian.

"We're advanced in terms of science and technology," he says, "but the attitude of the population is still Gothic. We still do not know what we're doing. We still do not know how to leave this planet the right way. We'll bring religion out into space and it'll be stopped. Because in the 1400s the word religion was restriction on a legion. Gothic is the architecture of the letter that was lost back in the 14th century. You can have four alternatives to human nature – genocide, plain old socialism like bees and ants have, love and dictatorship, which is what we have now, or you can have a lot of high powered megastructured knowledge where everything becomes not a socialistic bee-type statu but a militant state with megastructures. That's the way it should be – mass thinking, mass brain power as one." □ **Bi-Concepts Of The Rammeltze** is out this month on Gamma. For more on Rammeltze, see *The Wire* 158. Website: [www.gothicfuturism.com](http://www.gothicfuturism.com)









# SEARCHING FOR MY LEY LINE

Performing in mountain temples, ruined castles and industrial wastelands marked Ghost out as the most otherworldly group to emerge from Japan's psychedelic speedbreak scene. In Tokyo, Edwin Pouncey talks to Masaki Batoh and the group about their inner travelling, and the global alliances they have forged with US acid folk duo Damon & Naomi, ex-Can vocalist Damo Suzuki and the Tibetan resistance. Photos: Jun Takagi

**Anticipation is peaking** inside the bunker-like DeSeo, a rock venue in Tokyo's Shinjuku district. The fire curtain/movie screen hiding the stage bounces a flickering light through the choking fog of cigarette smoke into our already watering eyes. But such minor discomfort is immediately forgotten when the screen is finally lifted to release the jet roar of Ghost at full throttle. Led by guitarist and vocalist Masaki Batch, drummer Junzo Tatesawa and bass player Tokuyuki Moriya blast out a bidbeat that rises and falls like a kite tossed in a typhoon, while Kazuo Ojino slaps at his keyboards and a leather-clad Toshi Tezuka, appropriately nicknamed Giant, unleashes a mesmericising drone from his soprano sax that resembles a call to prayer. Tonight they're augmented by Can's legendary Japanese vocalist Damo Suzuki, whose low slung growl darkens the storm. And as he attempts to corkscrew his microphone stand through the floor, lead guitarist Michio Kurnhata peels off a synergistically charged solo that hangs in the air for several minutes before exploding into a feedback squall. This in turn triggers a scorching group improvisation, with Batch eventually bayoneting some invisible demonic force with the neck of his guitar to signal the set's touchdown. At 80 minutes, it may fall short of the monumental night eight years earlier, when Ghost and Suzuki jammed solidly for five hours until the sun came up, but it's still phenomenal. "My interest in music is kept alive by the different people I come into contact with," Batch later remarks about the encounter. "I don't really consider myself to be a professional musician like the other members of the band, I feel under pressure. I don't like being in the studio and I don't particularly enjoy playing live either. Being able to participate with people through my music and finding new ways to bond creatively is what is important to me."

Tonight's concert with Suzuki was to celebrate Ghost's latest CD, *Hypnotic Underworld*, the seventh album since their inception by Batch in 1984. Two decades on and their origins are shrouded in mystery, with rumours of formative years spent in caves and writing songs on subway stations in the dead of night enhancing their reputation as one of the more complex groups to emerge from the Japanese psychedelic underground. But Ghost have stubbornly refused to restrict themselves to rock, embracing a huge range of styles including World Music, Progressive, Krautrock, free jazz and Improv. Indeed the sheer range of *Hypnotic Underworld* consolidates Ghost's place in a Japanese pantheon documented on the Tokyo psychedelic spectrum label PSP's defining *Tokyo Flashback* series of compilations through the 1990s. What differentiates them, however, from their more abrasive contemporaries such as High Risk, Acid Mothers Temple, Musica Transonic and Keiji Haino is the incense that permeates and binds each member's highly personalised take on rock into the Ghost sound, which is at once cosmic and immensely physical. Ghost's sound is as old as time, even as it stands in the present like the ruins alluded to in the music of the group. Batch and Giant formed when they were at college together in the early 1980s. "Batch came up with the name *Gareki No Tokei*, which means City Of Fallen Trees," reveals Giant. "The theme behind it was an image of ruins. Batch played guitar and sang, while I played violin and piano. We played a form of free improvised music. The songs were meant to be heard as requiems in the ruins of some ancient forest that had been flattened by a typhoon."

The first ectoplasmic traces of Ghost can be found in these early musical experiments. Taking the communal

rock 'n' roll lifestyle of certain 1970s German groups, especially Amon Düül 2, as their role model, the evolving Ghost sought out a place where they could explore ideas without coming into conflict with the authorities. Eventually, on the outskirts of Tokyo, Batch found an ancient apartment complex and moved in with his girlfriend. Its dilapidated state, combined with the constant flow of visitors and group members, led to it becoming known as the Ghost House. The memory still haunts Batch. Though it wasn't all bad, he quickly dispels the illusion that he was part of a thriving alternative community. "Rather than looking back at that communal lifestyle as being something that influenced me in a positive way, I now have a feeling of frustration about all of the difficult things that happened there," he shudders. "Living together in that kind of commune system in Japan is completely different from, say, The Grateful Dead's house in San Francisco or Can's castle [Schloss Norwegen] near Cologne. There everybody had their own space and, to some extent, privacy. The house we shared together was more like a rundown student campus. As members of the band started to come through, though, it slowly became a kind of guest house, until eventually it finally transformed into a hippy type commune. It's not something that I look back on affectionately."

Ghost's improvisations soon began to spill out of its four walls on to the streets of Tokyo. On one occasion the group transported an arsenal of instruments to a seemingly deserted area for an impromptu street performance in the city's otherwise densely populated Shinjuku district, only to discover that the site was being secretly patrolled by the police.

"At the time we didn't know the police were there," laughs Batch. "We had set up our amps and equipment, and someone had even brought along a chainsaw to rip through an oil can just to create an interesting sound. Because the police were in hiding we were all busted immediately. They probably thought we were causing a dangerous situation with somebody using a chainsaw outside like that, but more likely they were offended that we were doing this right in front of them."

By this time the ranks of the Ghost House had swollen dramatically. Legend has it that at its peak up to 100 musicians were involved. "The most I can remember is 20," Batch scoffs. "In the beginning the band was made up from whoever was around when we started recording, which is why the early albums have different members playing on them. Those 'psychedelic' years were a great time because it was so free and things were allowed to just happen naturally."

Sadly, the natural rhythm of Ghost's early years was disrupted when their house was condemned and demolished in the late 90s. "It was really dangerous," smiles Batch. "If you pushed against the wall the entire house would start to lean." Their living conditions were hardly ideal but at least they permitted them to work under the same roof together. Living apart must have changed the way the group communicated with each other. "Now it is definitely different because the band members have less time and other commitments," confirms Batch. "We're older and have families, but we all have access to the Internet so we can still communicate with each other, and what time we do spend playing music together is spent more precisely."

When they were still called Eiyou Konran (Eternal Confusion), Batch and Giant's group recorded some demos with drummer Hiroyuki Usui, featuring two songs – the strongest of them a cover of traditional





Obon (clockwise from left to right): Masako Banai, Takayuki Matsuo, Kusao Oguri, Junzo Tatemoto, Michio Murakami and Shint

blues number "Blood Red River". Unfortunately many who heard it were confused by Eiyou Konrai's decidedly English folk leanings, which suggested the trio as Japan's answer to The Incredible String Band. Reactions to the tape were largely negative until Batch called in on Hidemitsu Ikezumi's Modern Music record store, a Tokyo underground landmark and home to PSF Records, the label responsible for unleashing the late 1980s/90s tsunami of independently produced Japanese psychadelia. "I often went to Modern Music as a customer," explains Batch, "and so one day I passed a tape of our music to him. To begin with I didn't really want to put a Ghost record out on PSF, because at that time they only had about eight titles out on their catalogue. I felt that by having Ghost alongside High Rise, Keiji Heno and White Heaven was too restrictive."

"He played the tape and in less than a minute Ikezumi said, 'That's great! Let me put this out!' He went crazy over it and I felt really happy that somebody finally understood and appreciated our music. We had all felt that we were playing great music and until that moment I was somewhat baffled by the negative reaction I had received from the other labels." But Ikezumi would only sign them on condition that they change their name. "As the band was formless and had no distinctive shape, it was decided that Ghost would be a perfect name to match its state and creative mood," recalls Batch. "On reflection, the entire experience of releasing the first Ghost records on PSF and our relationship with the label was very important to the development of the band."

Prior to the release of the first Ghost album in 1990, Batch had travelled abroad in search of new experiences. He set out first for Morocco, not only to broaden his horizons and clear his head, but also to embark on a personal quest which, he hoped, would be spiritually as well as creatively beneficial. "I went to Morocco for six months when I was 22 years old, partly because I was bored with being in a band and felt unsure whether I wanted to continue making music within that format any more," he reveals. "I remember Morocco as being very intense with a completely different culture from the one I had imagined, and this really affected me." Being a stranger in a strange land caused the young musicians to reflect on their own culture as well as the one he was passing through. "The Moroccans I met called me a pig when I told them I didn't have a religion," he muses. "It wasn't said in a rude way and I wasn't offended, but it made me realise the differences and vastness of Islamic culture. I responded by telling them that not all Japanese are Buddhists, but their reaction made me think about my own country's religion a lot." After Morocco, Batch hitchhiked across Europe to Spain, Portugal and finally Britain, where he spent several months squatting in a house in Brixton, South London. He cruised the gig circuit, catching up with his teenage idols such as Hawkwind and Gong, as well as folk hero Martin Carthy and free jazz diva Annette Peacock. Upon his return to Tokyo he began preparations for the first Ghost album with a line-up including Grant and bass player Kotji Nishino, White Heaven guitarist Michio Kurihara, multi-instrumentalist Kazuo Ogino and mysterious female singer Mu Kurena on percussion and "whisper", with Batch slumping into a swirling sea of creativity inspired by his Moroccan travels and numerous long strange trips of the drug-induced kind.

"We used anything we could get our hands on,"

laughs Batch. "I saw paradise and I saw hell and some of the experiences and dreams I vaguely remembered from that period became the theme for Ghost's early music." In Japan, where possession of cannabis comes a five year sentence, strict anti-drug laws made Batch's quest for inner enlightenment a dangerous one not to be undertaken lightly. The drug of choice for most was the easily available speed, which acted as the perfect stimulant for Japanese musicians to thrash out their craft all night. The favoured hallucinogen remained magic mushrooms, which were a legal, plentiful and natural high. While some musicians like Keiji Heno have been strongly against drugs, as they interfered with the focus of their work, Ghost were completely committed to an artistic lifestyle that went beyond the parameters of accepted social behaviour and used drugs to open up new possibilities. "Having one's mind expanded by drugs creates a different reality, and our aim was to create music by using parts of the brain that are not usually active," explains Batch, "in that sense you can think of our music as being psychadelic."

Batch and the group emerged from their inner and outer journeys of discovery with the set of songs that became their debut album *Ghost* on PSF. The record immediately established the group as a major force in the Japanese underground. Its first track, "Sun is Tangled", proves the efficacy of their mindloving technique. It opens with the sound of a tribal celebration, before gently folding into and folk, with Batch softly strumming his acoustic guitar while Grant's flute playing soars and swoops through the song like a peregrine falcon. "For that song the lyrics were written first and the music came later," recalls Batch. "It was the first song I wrote for Ghost and the images came from my experience of Morocco in 1988. 'Sun is Tangled', I imagined being in a desert where there is an oasis, and you're tripping there."

Ghost effectively revisited their debut's powerful hallucinatory style and took it even further out on its successor, *Second Time Around* (1992). For the album the group had expanded to include drummer two Yonezaki and Ghost House members Daisuke Nagamura on vocals, oboe player Misasan Shioya and Tomo Kurihara on various instrumentation – with everyone contributing "1000 gongs, bell tree, Tibetan bells, duff, bell drums, karamba and some nameless bells and stones". Levitating their sound from freeform folk to ceremonial mantra, Ghost consolidated the growing spiritual ambience of the music on their third album, *Temple Stone* (1994), culled from concert recordings made in various temples.

"People may hear these influences in Ghost," cautions Grant, "but we are not really aware of trying to push forward a certain style of playing. Each member of the band has their own creative persona, which comes through unconsciously while they are playing. It's not something that's contrived." "It's certainly not something I think about when we're playing together," adds Ogino. "I'm glad if the audience do pick up on something spiritual during a performance, but we're not really concerned about how the music is received."

That said, you can feel an undoubted presence seeping through the music performed at these temples that goes beyond the acoustics of the chosen venue. Ghost might disingenuously claim that playing and recording in temples are simply ways of enhancing their sound, but these performances almost take on the significance of offerings. "We

don't choose to play in temples because they are places of worship," argues Batch. "It's more to do with the atmosphere they have, which is very important to the band's music. I believe there is a chance to communicate more fully with the audience when the atmosphere of the place we are performing in is right. It's not just temples where we like to play, though. We also perform in abandoned warehouses and anywhere that has a natural feeling for us. Some rock clubs might have a similar atmosphere but they are very rare, especially in Japan."

Recorded at Senyu Temple and Waseeda Salvation Church between 1992 and 1993, *Temple Stone*'s performances resonate with an almost supernatural sanctity. As Batch relates, before Ghost could enter the holy ground of Senyu, they had to endure a form of penance. "That was a concert we did on top of a mountain in Saitama," recalls Batch. "To get permission to play inside the temple we had to negotiate. In the end we said we were a band that played medieval music. We had to tell this white man in order to be able to play there. This temple is one of the oldest wooden churches in Japan. It has a truly unique acoustic, which was part of the reason why we were so keen to use it. We almost died because we had to carry all of our equipment up there. The performance took several days to prepare because it was difficult to get up there. It was cold, there was no electricity and several people got lost on the way. Once we made it to the top we said prayers and made offerings. I remember Kurihara saying that he felt the Buddha had entered into us and he was freaking out."

"I have been very interested in the spirit world," Batch remarks, discussing his solo diversion in 1995, when he retreated inside the Ghost House to work up a new set of songs for a future Ghost album on two- and four-track open reel tape recorders. He resurfaced a year later with enough material for two albums, both eventually released as the vinyl-only LPs *A Ghost From The Darkened Sea* and *Rikabubeki*; under his own name on California independent, The New Sound, and later compiled as a single CD, *Collected Works* (1995-1996). Housed in a sleeve with Batch superimposed over a magical pentagram, the set stands as one of his finest and most mystical recordings. "I first became interested in the history of Western magical tradition by reading Eliphas Lévi's *Transcendental Magic*," Batch continues, "and that book led me to become interested in alchemy and the ideas behind Eastern magical tradition as well. These magical ideas are influential and can be found in the music, but it was not something that was channelled into it intentionally."

The key to his solo collections is Batch's astonishing acoustic reworking of Cai's "Yoo Doo Right", which turns the original inside out without pulling it apart. "I often get people asking me if Cai are my favourite band because they hear such a correlation between them and Ghost," he sighs. "In fact I have only ever heard two Cai albums, *Monster Movie* and *Soundtracks*. It was their early period that I admired most, especially when they were playing with Damo Suzuki and Malcolm Mooney, who are crazy, godlike singers."

"Yoo Doo Right" happened when I was playing my guitar at home looking for a riff for a new song I was writing, and for some reason "Yoo Doo Right" fitted. At that point the song I was working on turned unintentionally into a cover version. When I later met Malcolm Mooney – who is now a university professor – in the US he listened to what I had done and said,

'This isn't "Yoo Doo Right"! What are you talking about?' Then I played it to Can's guitarist Michael Karoli, who said, 'This is great. You have destroyed Can with this version'. I felt very honoured to hear that from Michael, who is now dead.'

Batoh applies the same technique to two covers on *Hygienic Underworld*: 'Hazy Paradise' by 70s Dutch group Earth & Fire and Pink Floyd founder Syd Barrett's 'Dominos'. 'When I play guitar I sometimes have trouble finding a lyric to it,' he explains, 'so I try singing something from another song and occasionally that's what fits best. It's like a deconstruction process. Obviously the songs Ghost cover are ones we really like, but the reason I consider them to be deconstructions is that I know these are great songs, which I respect very much, and if I can't improve on them I would rather deconstruct them.'

Batoh is not so eager to talk about his deconstruction of free jazz singer Patty Waters's 'Black Is The Color Of My True Love's Hair', recorded live in 1988 with Ghost offshoots Peiro Manzoni. 'I played bass with that mostly improvisational band,' he grumes. 'Unfortunately I don't have many fond memories from that period.'

Presumably he maintained a tactful silence about it when he met Patty Waters at last year's Le Weekend festival in Stirling, Scotland. 'It was very weird to see Keiji Haino and Patty Waters in the same place,' he smiles. 'I first saw her coming down the stairs from the hotel and thought, Whoa! I had to bow and give her my respects. I told her that I was very influenced by her and asked if she would sing "Black Is The Color" but unfortunately she said no.'

'The only groups I remember liking in the early 80s were The Birthday Party and The Robbing Gristle,' he continues, about Waters's influence on Ghost.

'Everything else seemed empty and lacked spirit. Even free jazz was becoming staid, which is not how it should have been, but one day I found a book on free jazz that listed Patty Waters. I was extremely excited to learn that a female free jazz vocalist existed, and so I began to search for her two records on ESP-Disk. I listened to them everywhere at full volume, even in the car! Patty Waters and Amon Daul are the two important elements that are central to the music of Ghost.' He pauses, asserting, 'In a way if there had been no Patty Waters then there would have been no Ghost.'

As early as the first Ghost album, Batoh had displayed concern about China's occupation of Tibet, in a series of 'Mongoid' songs. 'I heard about this young Tibetan activist who was practising his activism against the Chinese through non-violent means,' he recalls. 'At the same time he was also trying to befriend the people who had given him and his fellow Tibetan refugee asylum in a western town in India called Mongoid. I was very moved by this story, which made me think about what, if anything, could I do to help this cause. As the only weapon I had was music, I wrote a series of songs about Mongoid.' Batoh's continuing concern came to a head after the group moved to American label Drag City in 1996, with their fourth album *Lama Rabi Rabi*. 'We were let go by PSF because we were spending too much money, saying too many crazy things, and not being productive enough,' confesses Batoh.

The label move gave Ghost a new lease of life – not that it was immediately noticeable to Drag City, which had to wait another three years for *Lama Rabi Rabi*'s successor, *Snuffbox Immancino* (1999). But Ghost compensated for its hardness by simultaneously

**"THE SONGS WERE MEANT TO BE REQUIEMS IN THE RUINS OF SOME ANCIENT FOREST THAT HAD BEEN FLATTENED BY A TYPHOON"**



laying down their politically motivated sixth album *Tune In, Turn On, Free Tibet*. By this time the situation in Tibet had worsened, yet the rest of the civilised world looked on and did nothing. "In the end I proposed recording a benefit album to Ongi and Kunihara," Batch continues. "Fortunately they were also really excited by the idea. We contacted the Tibetan office and told them we wanted to record an album to support their cause. They agreed to our proposal and I was later told that the Dalai Lama was very pleased and had given the project his approval." Fired by Batch's enthusiasm, Ghost came up with a stunning, if often confusing blend of protest song and experimental improvisation, which peaked with the epic, freefalling title track. The latter was inspired by an Amnesty International report on atrocities suffered under Chinese rule. "I said to the other members, 'When a country like Tibet can be burdened like this, and all the developed countries are looking the other way... Doesn't this make you mad?' I then asked them to respond to the information in a natural way, through sound. We ran the tape and recorded it in one take." Despite disappointing sales, Batch is justly proud of *Free Tibet*. "I haven't been told whether the Dalai Lama heard it or not," he laughs, "but I did hear that he has the *Free Tibet* album poster on his wall."

Other notable Ghost fans include singer/songwriter duo Damon & Naomi. The seed of their friendship and future collaborations was a fan letter Naomi sent Batch after hearing their first two albums. Through a series of misadventures she and Damon found themselves playing alongside Ghost as part of Wayne Rogers and Kate Biggar's Magic Hour band on a tour snaking through Eastern and Midwest America in the spring of 1995. "It was a difficult time for us as it was our first tour over there," recalls Batch, "but Damon & Naomi were very good to us and we all got on well together. Another interesting thing I discovered was that Damon's father was one of the Polish refugees evacuated to Japan to escape from the Nazis. He was helped by a famous Japanese person called Chiune Sugihara, who worked hard to obtain visas for Poles to enter the country. So Japan was a very important place for Damon, and our meeting had a strange synchronicity. I felt that we had known each other from a long time ago."

For Damon & Naomi, the bond with Ghost was forged when the equipment van they were all in unexpectedly blew a tire on the Ohio turnpike. "Ghost piled out of the van looking more psychedeelic than anything Ohio had probably seen since Kent State," laughs Damon, during a brief telephone call. "Within minutes a state trooper materialised. As the cop was getting out of his car, we looked around and discovered that Ghost had wandered off. They were now in the fields by the side of the highway... picking flowers. I felt sure that we were going to be arrested on some kind of charge, like importing Japanese hippies without a licence."

The experience of working and touring with Damon & Naomi helped Ghost rediscover themselves. The duo's comradeship and enthusiasm convinced the group that they were being taken seriously by a larger audience – and not just confined to their homeland. Damon & Naomi went on to make their debut as a duo in Japan, with Ghost as their backing group. The Damon/Ghost connection was reprised in America with a series of double duo concerts, which eventually led to two Damon & Naomi albums with Ghost and Kunihara respectively on Sub Pop. "After we

made our album with Ghost, Kunihara was the only one who was free to support it on tour," explains Damon. "We toured the US, UK, Europe, Japan and even Brazil, and our sound as a trio developed to the point that we wanted to release a live album to document that."

The resulting *Song To The Siren* is an illuminating document of Damon & Naomi's work with the guitarist whose distinctive West Coast sound was the driving force behind Tokyo psych group White Heaven as well as Ghost. Kunihara's model – "his God" – tesses Batch – Quicksilver Messenger Service guitarist, the late John Cipollina. "I'm a very big fan," he shyly admits. "I don't mean to imitate that, but it's a style of playing that I consciously strive towards in order to understand it better." The depth of Kunihara's Cipollina worship betrayed itself in Cleveland while touring with Damon & Naomi, when they stumbled across the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame.

"The first thing we see in the lobby is Cipollina's amplifier in a huge glass case," laughs Damon. "It's two stacks hinged together like a bible with a series of long brass horns affixed to the top. Naomi wanted to take Kun's picture in front of the amp, but a guard ran over to stop her. It turns out that the Hall of Fame owns the image to anything in their collection."

"It was really great to see that," sighs Kunihara. "I was so overwhelmed that I spent 30 minutes just studying these objects."

Masaki Batch confesses to an aversion to recording and touring, yet Ghost's long strange trip shows no sign of letting up. *Hypnotic Underworld* is their most accomplished album to date. The four-part composition making up the title track reveals Ghost's full kaleidoscopic range. Batch explains, "The first part, 'God Took A Picture Of His Illness On This Ground', is an improvisation based on a description I gave to the band of primordial times, before the yin and yang split, before things were created and the earth was in turmoil and trying to shape itself. I told them that we should play our instruments like that, and they responded with chaos." Taking on board Batch's vision, the group summoned up all their energy and ingenuity to achieve the dazzling multidimensional effect characterising *Hypnotic Underworld*. "We used two separate studios for the recording," beams Giant, "one for the acoustic and the other for the electric instruments. It was the first time we tried this technique, but something magical happened because of it." That magical something is reinforced by Batch's choice of cover art, which depicts a 19th century fallen warrior turned ascetic monk called Mongaku. In Batch's interpretation, Mongaku is "performing spiritual training under a waterfall to cleanse and empty himself. Above him various gods are looking down on him and protecting him from harm." He continues, "and although this image has nothing to do with the music, in a way the central character embodies what Ghost are today. Like him, we too are just trying to do our own thing by emptying ourselves creatively and spiritually in the real hope that we are somehow being protected."

In his other life Batch is a qualified acupuncturist. "Damo Suzuki always says to me, 'Why don't you guys call your show *A Live Healing* and restrict it to sick people? You can play a concert and afterwards you give them acupuncture!' I think that's a great idea," Batch laughs. "I sometimes wonder why we haven't done that already." □ *Hypnotic Underworld* is out now on Drag City. Thanks to translators Alan Basshert and Alan Cummings for their help with this feature.







# THE PRIMER: CECIL TAYLOR

A bi-monthly guide to the core recordings of a particular artist or genre.  
This month: Brian Morton celebrates the 75th birthday of pianist Cecil Taylor with an introduction to his tumultuous, tempestuous back catalogue.

Illustration: Savage Pencil

Jazz writer Whitney Balliett once wrote that the audience at a Cecil Taylor concert looked as if the floor had suddenly got hot under their feet. He didn't mean they were dancing. None of the great modernists in jazz packs such an alienating wallop as Cecil Taylor. None of his piano successors – and Marilyn Crispell, Borah Bergman and Matthew Shipp are successors, not disciples – have ever conjured such a visceral impact. And yet few of the major innovators in jazz and its diaspora have been so casually deified and equally casually overlooked. Consider how infrequently a Cecil Taylor album appears in 'ten greatest ever' polls: *Kind Of Blue*, *A Love Supreme*, *This Is Our Music*, *The Black Saint And The Sinner Lady*, *Out To Lunch!*... Yes to each, but *Unit Structures*? *Conquistador*?

Taylor may be unwittingly complicit. He certainly helped to neutralise the discomfort identified by Balliett when he added spoken verse, singing and dancing as part of his stage improvisations, often not approaching the piano for many minutes. He also threw critics and writers of sleeve notes an endlessly re-usable tagline when he redefined the piano as "BB tuned drums". Relieved of any obligation to analyse his pianism, they gratefully recast him as a shaman figure, throwing shapes and spells, beating out occult messages from an impenetrable interior.

No one who has ever listened to Taylor will mistake him for a percussivist. His keyboard style is clean-edged and ringing, with very little use of the pedals. It's a style that comes from Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk, and less obviously from Dave Brubeck, but it also shows an awareness of the great Harlem stride pianists. It's rooted deeply in dance, which helps explain the later switch to terpsichore in

live performance. Taylor's partial abandonment of the keyboard in later years comes from a different place from Keith Jarrett's philosophical anxiety about instrumentalism. Similarly, he has shown little interest in "inside" techniques and preparations. Once you accept that unexpectedly conservative angle of approach, a certain consensus about Taylor's musical content begins to falter as well.

After the death of Caesar, Rome divided the known world into three, after the death of Charlie Parker, critics set about redrawing borders that had been blurred by alien incursions. As with the empire, a triumvirate was at hand. The most familiar sounding of the new dispensation was John Coltrane. However extreme and extended this method, his freedom was vertical harmony, the chords of old and well-loved songs. From the south came the raw tones of Ornette Coleman, whose experiments concentrated on the interaction of melody and rhythm, a warped mashing-up of Parker's boppy fused to ancient blues. That left the murky province of 'tonality' to Cecil Taylor.

What was assassinated this time was the truth. Even as the crudest sketch, this map of modern jazz makes little sense. Coltrane was also a sublime melodist, who in later life became obsessed with the untapped possibilities of rhythm. Coleman's music was premised on idiosyncratic harmonics, either visionary or haughty depending on your point of view. Most seriously, Taylor's music is no more atomist than Arnold Schoenberg's music is 'serialist'. His use of dissonance as a structural principle was new and unsettling, but it was no more distant from the jazz mainstream than Coltrane's extension of Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, or Ornette's appropriation



The "A" Train". Its out of whack metre and bizarre intervallic jumps are the surest guide to what lay ahead. "Waltzing", meanwhile, is Taylor's nod to what lay behind.

### JOHN COLTRANE COLTRANE TIME

BLUES NOTE 0244612 CD 1986

Purists will rightly wonder at the attribution, since despite the title this was originally a Taylor LP, and it bespeaks a certain commercial cynicism on the label's part to reissue it under Coltrane's name, or indeed to issue it at all, because the music is terrible. Though Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk came at bop from different perspectives, their rare encounters are illuminating documents. This isn't. Coltrane goes manfully over a raw, dissonant accompaniment. It was trumpeter Kenny Dorham, drafted in late, who torpedoes the set, reportedly incensed at Taylor's weird chords. They limp through Dorham's "Shifting Down", a couple of standards and "Double Clutching" and then presumably vowed never to do it again.

### CECIL TAYLOR THE WORLD OF CECIL TAYLOR

CANDI 00000005 CD 1980

#### JUMPIN' PUNKINS

CANDI 00000133 CD 1984

A spell at Candid put Taylor close to the orbit of another great modernist, Charles Mingus, albeit without hitting at another potentially disastrous collaboration. The World Of has Archie Shepp blating away in front of the pianist's increasingly splintered chords, though unlike Dorham, the saxophonist has no difficulty finding places to put his feet on "A" and "B", and presumably he knew the chords to "This Nearly Was Mine" and "Lazy Afternoon" well enough to run them in his head. Shepp is also around on Jumpin' Punkins, but it's trumpeter Clark Terry's presence that raises eyebrows. Along with Lucy and bassist Roswell Rudd, he plays on Mercer Ellington's title piece and the reissue's two takes of Ellington senior's "Things Ain't What They Used To Be". There's nowhere better than in these very different versions to grasp the wonky logic of Taylor's exuberantly random chording.

### GIL EVANS INTO THE HOT

IMPULSE! MCA 33104 CD 1981

Evans not really Gil Evans at all, but a weirdly covert way of marketing some otherwise unlistenable and unbearable Taylor septet material as if the old Swengaf had sprinkled some of his magic dust over it. There are three Taylor pieces, which ought to leave four by Evans, except that the remainder are John Coltrane compositions and arrangements. Into The Hot is one of the oddest records ever issued – a bit like finding Charles Gayle tracks tacked onto a Justin Timberlake album – and were it not for the dearth of Taylor studio material from this period, it wouldn't be worth listing.

of field hollers, church singing and bar-walking R&B. Schencking distrusted the term *atmosphere* because it implied a music without tones, which is palpable nonsense. He preferred 'atmospheric', which makes a certain literal sense but doesn't take the argument forward an inch.

Through the discography makes him seem the most monolithic of important modern musicians – few living artists have been able to release such monumental statements as the ten CD set 27s For A Lovely 7 or the 1988 duo series on FMP – and though his improvisations have a massiveness that is almost geological, Taylor is the most subtly infected, joyous and playful of the recent masters. His piano playing, which remains the heart of his work, is trippingly bright and often deceptively straightforward.

Cecil Percival Taylor was born in New York City on 12 March 1929. He began piano lessons at the age of six and later studied at the New York College of Music and the New England Conservatory. As a young musician, he worked with saxophonist Johnny Hodges and trumpeter Hot Lips Page, but since 1955 Taylor has always worked as a leader, and apart from a short period in the band of bassist Buel Neidinger, a guest spot with The Jazz Composers Orchestra, and as a duo performer with drummer Max Roach and fellow pianist Mary Lou Williams, the latter disastrously, he has never shared top billing, though record labels have occasionally tried to fob off his challenging work as if it were John Coltrane's or Gil Evans's.

The discography is immense, with an unusual emphasis on live performances. After the late 1950s, it dispenses with standards or repertoire material – a title like the 1959 Cecil Taylor Plays Cole Porter sounds so preposterous that even fans have suspected a joke. Though admired and even venerated, the work remains, like the man himself, curiously enigmatic and bewilderingly unexplored, as if those borders were prohibitions rather than welcoming points of engagement.

### CECIL TAYLOR LOOKING AHEAD!

ORIGINAL JAZZ CLASSICS/CONTEMPORARY 00000423 CD 1988

There are earlier sessions than this – the Blue Notes Jazz Advances and Love For Sale, which briefly reappeared in the mid-70s on a double LP called *In Transition* – but this is a first taste of Taylor as composer rather than standards player. The lessons of Thelonious Monk and Duke Ellington, whose work features on the first records, have been well absorbed and Taylor is increasingly surefooted in his movement through material that already sounds like an elaborate codex of phrases, scales and shapes, infinitely open to manipulation. Vibraphonist Earl Griffith sounds old-fashioned and slightly uneasy, but plays his part alongside Buel Neidinger and Dennis Charles.

"Lupelt! The Golden Step" is an early example of his surrealistic poetic touch with titles, an edgy, skittering piece that establishes the tone of the set. It ends with the first truly important recorded piece, "Excursion On A Wooley Rail", a meditation on "Take

### CECIL TAYLOR

NEFERTITI, THE BEAUTIFUL ONE HAS COME

REVENANT 002 3302 CD 1982

After the flurry of activity and savvy market placing of his Candid period (exhaustively documented on a Mosaic box set), the early 80s were a fallow time for Taylor in the studio. He did, however, forge arguably the two most important associations of his career, finding in absent Jimmy Lyons a real player who understood his musical language and in Sunny Murray a drummer who offered a free pulse as intensely consistent as his own heterodox chording. Lyons is unmistakably boppy but his style of alto playing goes back well beyond Parker to Willie Smith, who replaced Johnny Hodges in the Ellington group. Taylor would have been aware of that association and found something of the same taut, intensely vocal sound in Lyons's playing. Apart from Neidinger, Taylor seemed unwilling to work with bass players, and this too became his staple. The Cafe Montmartre gigs in Copenhagen, like the later sessions at the Fondation Maeght in France, are legendary, producing the first of many live albums. Reissues have included variant approaches to sharp originals like "Calf", and alternative versions of the titanic "O Trad, That's What", which picks up and develops a line of enquiry embarked on the first records. Lyons is squelching intense, only remotely boppy and has an instinct for where the spaces are in the fabric of the piano playing. Taylor never treated a saxophonist as much again, and when Lyons died prematurely in 1986 he found it virtually impossible to replace him.

### UNIT STRUCTURES

BLUES NOTE 025337 CD 1986

### CONQUISTADOR

BLUES NOTE 040500 1986

### STUDENT STUDIES

FUEL 0000 000000 CD 1988

This was the annus mirabilis that turned into a cell de sac. Unit Structures is a forbidding title when set alongside the more obviously programmatic *A Love Supreme* or *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, and at first blush it's forbidding music, too: tense, driven passages of piano and horns (Lyons and multi-instrumentalist Ken Midnite), with two bass players laying down tonal ambiguities. And yet, much as Anthony Braxton's mathematical palimpsests conceal surprisingly straightforward procedures, Unit Structures isn't rocket science either. The title piece, which stands somewhat apart from the rest of the record, offers brief contexts or cues for improvisation, while simultaneously building a musical pattern that only yields its full figurative when the full 17 minutes has elapsed. By contrast, "Enter, Evening", now heard in two takes, is more impressionistic, while "Tales (8 Whispers)" points forward to the free associative language of the later work, and indeed the oral poetry that began to punctuate Taylor's piano playing. The main problem with Unit Structures is the recording. Bassists Henry Grimes and the magnificent Alan Silva are in the wrong



place in the stereo picture and the mix pushes drummer Andrew Cyrille and trumpeter Gale Stevens Jr (what became of him?) in front of the piano. A classic nonetheless, albeit cruder and muddier at the point of delivery than the elements would suggest.

Five months later, in October 1966, Taylor recorded *Conquistador* with Bill Dixon replacing Stevens. The sound is cleaner, the group somewhat better balanced instrumentally, the music more confidently executed. The title makes sense, and makes sense of what followed, not because of its slashing brilliance and violent colour, but because it dramatizes a collision of whole cultures, in this case European art music and the cry of the blues, though who is conqueror and who conquered is kept deliberately ambiguous. With typical perversity, the label has preferred to keep *Conquistador* in the vaults, though an augmented reissue is promised for later this year.

*Student Studies* has only recently reappeared on CD, rounding out an important year in Taylor studies. In some regards it's a throwback, an acolyte's awkwardly respectful homage to Ellington, Bud Powell and, on "Niggle Feugle", ragtime/blues pianist and composer James P Johnson as well. Set alongside the other work of that summer, though, it's a much more advanced essay. After 1966, Taylor wouldn't record for Blue Note again, and was inclined to avoid the studios altogether.

#### AKISAKILA

KONNEX KCD60946 2XCD 1970

There are July 1969 recordings of the Taylor trio in Paris. They're shaky in quality and now somewhat dubious in provenance, with subsequent issues sounding as if they were lifted straight off the vinyl LPs. If *Notes De La Fondation Maeght* (Shandor) offers a striking glimpse of Taylor, Lyons and Cyrille in performance (with Sam Rivers guesting on tenor and soprano sax), its fiery performances are tame compared to the seismic power of the Tokyo concert, released in two parts as *Akisakila*. The sound quality isn't pristine, and Lyons often has to play piggy in the middle, but what you hear is a group fully in possession of its own language. Stretching to 80 minutes, the only piece "Bulu Akisakila Kataha" is demanding for both performers and listener, but it again reveals an insistent structure and a logic of development that is recapitulated every time Taylor takes a more or less orthodox solo.

#### MARY LOU WILLIAMS EMBRACED

PUBLIC 20010109 LP 1977

If there is a word stronger than debacle, this is it. Pianist and educator Mary Lou Williams had the idea of Taylor joining on what had become a kind of concert history of jazz music from ragtime and stride to bebop and beyond. The problem was that Taylor, who apparently hadn't agreed to any such role, started in the beyond and wouldn't come back. The result is a mess and scarcely worthy of the vinyl, but it does illustrate a valuable point. However unwilling or unprepared Taylor was to play rags and stride vamps,



Top: Cecil Taylor and group on stage in 1966, circa Unit Structures/Conquistador. Bottom: Taylor, late 80s

Williams had shrewdly identified him as a man unshakably rooted in that tradition.

## CECIL TAYLOR CECIL TAYLOR UNIT

NEW WORLD NW231 CD 1978

### 3 PHASIS

NEW WORLD NW230 CD 1978

The beauty of Taylor's studio records is that he generally got a decent piano to play, only to go right ahead and tape a live session. The first of the two New World discs mimicked that word "unit" again, a key concept for a musician who demanded coherence and unity of purpose, but who also saw himself and his fellow players as cadres in some legitimising campaign against slackness and superficiality in modern music. Still leaning heavily on Lyons, he recruited trumpeter Rahe Malik, bassist Sironne (Noms Jones) and two musicians who had worked with Albert Ayler, violinist Ramsay Ameen and drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson. These are undervalued recordings, perhaps perversely because they are less torrential than their predecessors, more inclined to introspection than to all out assault.

## CECIL TAYLOR

### GARDEN PT 1 & 2

HR HUT 02002 2CDP 1981

Here is one of the very few places in the canon where Taylor's '88 tuned piano' analogy makes complete sense. Striking out complex whole-tone lines of unfathomable length and intensity, he makes his Beethovenian Impresario sound like a gamester or a Korean court orchestra. Elsewhere, though, and this is the rub, he plays like James P. Johnson or Jelly Roll Morton, blues-laden roots piano built over taut left-hand figures. Unlike Boris Berman, who has abolished the left-right distinction and treats the whole keyboard as a continuum, here and on earlier solo records like the 1973 set on the Tico label, Taylor is still very much in the Tatum/Wallace tradition, comping abstractly but still behind his own top lines. "Stepping On Stars" might almost be a Morton composition and is directly in that lineage. "Driver Says" might almost be a return to the Ellington-inspired language of "Excursion On A Webby Rail", and with the same wry humour. The vocal improvisations at the beginning are like invocations to a ritual, but not a solemn one. This is Taylor the trickster at his most merciful.

## WINGED SERPENT (SLIDING QUADRANTS)

SOUL NOTE 121069 CD 1984

Though surprisingly little known, this is Taylor's finest large group recording, four long compositions for a band including trumpeters Enrico Rava and Tomasz Stanko, saxophonists Frank Wright, Guster Hampel and John Tchicai, influential bassist Karen Borca and the emerging bassist William Parker. The genius of the music is again its radical simplicity, small-scale cells and motifs allowed to develop into forms that resemble roughhewn gemstones. The obvious analogy is

Ellington's virtuosic balance of command and liberality, a sternly authoritarian code expressed individualistically and in the soloists' own voices. The hardness and sparkle of these tracks are hard to exaggerate. Through it all, the piano is as hard, soft, strong and mutable as carbon. A very great record.

## LIVE IN BOLOGNA

LEO LEO2100 CD 1987

## LIVE IN VIENNA

LEO LEO2114 CD 1987

Jimmy Lyons died the year before. It was less surprising that Taylor replaced him with fellow elastist Carter Ward than that he tried to replace him at all. Ward's cool flingee approach is less out of place than one might suppose because it is largely irrelevant. The real dynamic of these powerful concerts lies in the healing magic Taylor conjures up with violinist Leroy Jenkins, bassist William Parker and above all percussionist Thurman Barker, lately working as an educator, but on his day one of the finest players around. Jenkins can play like a folk fiddler or like a kettle of witches, and Taylor always sounds easiest when, along with his own, other canonical instruments are being put to nefarious ends.

## CHINAMPAS

LEO LEO2102A CD 1987

Something happened to the soul of the piano in 1987. Keith Jarrett closed the lid on the keyboard and made an allsorts album called *Spirits*. Cecil Taylor left the door unambiguously open but for a moment fell back on his other instrument: that November, he recorded an album of poetry. It's dense, associative stuff and at moments it's unclear whether Cecil is reading from a prepared text or improvising verbally. Singing, movement and fragments of speech had become part of his stage performance. He had subverted the pragmatic neutrality of the performer's approach to the piano by singing, caressing and dancing with it. It was no longer possible to hear the piano as Taylor's "instrument" but as his living share, and what more dramatic way of underlining the point than by putting out an album with no piano whatsoever? Its importance only became clear the following summer.

## BERLIN 88

FMP C398 10XCD 1998

One of the great documents of modern music. Originally issued as a box set, now sadly fragmented, *Berlin 88* comes from a festival of Taylor's music held in Berlin in July 1988. *Alms/Tenggarten (Sarje)* (FMP 8/9 2XCD) is a big band double set, rolling and powerful; *Legion Crossing* (FMP 0) is merely a workshop, a masterclass directed by Taylor. The rest, though, find Taylor in intimate communication with what feels like a whole generation of European improvisors, duo playing of astonishing intensity and concentration. *Robec* (FMP 2) restored the partnership with drummer Gunter "Baby" Sommer, which had yielded the fine *In East Berlin* the previous



Top: Jimmy Lyons

Middle and bottom: mid-90s and mid-70s Taylor



year. The others document new and developing relationships with other percussionists. Paul Lovers on *Regalo* (FMP 3), Louis Moholo on *Remembrance* (FMP 4), Hans Bennink on *Spots, Circles And Fantasy* (FMP 5) and Tony Oxley on *Leaf Palm Hand* (FMP 6) significantly develop the languages Taylor had adumbrated with Cyrilie, Sunny Murray and more shakily with the young Ronald Shannon Jackson. If he'd once defined the piano as 'tuned drums', these European players here and elsewhere sought to raise the primitive drumkit to a place in the canon and make it do the work of a string section (as Oxley's electronic add-ons have always implied), or a whole pit band in the case of Lovers and Bennink. There were other encounters in Berlin: Derek Bailey on *Platzstaub Mit Wasser* (FMP 16), a trio with Evan Parker and Tristan Honsinger on *Hearth* (FMP 11) and a solo set on *Ecuzile Maketh Scent* (FMP 18), but the drummers define this remarkable occasion. Taylor sounds merciful, joyous, infinitely playful. Though he sticks to his keyboard, he is, as Marilyn Crispell called him, 'le chevrier qui danse'. There is no recording like this in modern improvisation. The multi-volume *2 Ts For A Lovely* 7, which documents a later association with Oxley and bassist William Parker, is titanic but lacks the multi-voiced communion of Berlin 88. Everyone who wants to understand Taylor, not to mention improvisation, should attempt to listen to this set night through, just once.

#### CELEBRATED BLAZONS

FMP 56 CD 1989

#### LOOKING (BERLIN VERSION)

FMP 56 CD 1989

#### LOOKING (BERLIN VERSION) CORONA

FMP 51 CD 1988

#### LOOKING (THE FEEL TRIO)

FMP 35 CD 1989

Celebrated Blazons is another of the great Taylor records, not least because it finds him working with a group – American William Parker on bass, Englishman and German resident Tony Oxley on drums and percussion – that unmistakably restores his jazz lineage, but takes it off on a rhythmic and harmonic axis at right angles to the classic Lyons/Cyrille partnership. Where Cyrilie flouted like the Niger, Tony Oxley plays musical quanta, packets of metrical heat and light that are impossible to count and measure. Where the older group dispensed with a double bass, William Parker provides a rich accompaniment, the most resonant, symphonic playing since the heyday of Richard Davis, who was Eric Dolphy's favourite bassist for a time. The relativistic analogy applies even better to Looking, a single piece played in three different versions: solo and densely with the piano sounding like a loft of church bells; then less happily with Parker and Oxley and two added string players; and then finally by the trio, the group that in 1988 and 1990 was the perfect expression of Taylor's will. Looking (The Feel Trio) is an immense experience, and all the greater for those tentative or portentous earlier versions.

#### 2 TS FOR A LOVELY T

CODANIA ONE 102CD 1990

Looking (The Feel Trio) is, however, only a prelude to the astonishing richness of *2 Ts For A Lovely* 7, a ten CD box set recorded live in London in 1990 and released a dozen years later. Where the components of Berlin 88 caught Cecil Taylor in a dynamic encounter with like-minded players, this is more of a summation, an unfolding of musical language and practice over several nights of intense playing with a group that performs as a nrichly faceted but single functional unit.

The only workable analogy for Taylor's role by this stage is that of an epic singer. His practice recalls oral formulaic theory whereby the epic bard draws on a vast reservoir of narrative, atmosphere, colour and rhetorical devices and weaves new performances spontaneously and in real time. In other words, it de-emphasises originality at source while placing a radical new emphasis on the synthesising skill of the improviser.

Night on night, the trio can be heard deconstructing and re-assembling the same ideas, but always in radically new contexts. There is one inconstant three note phrase that Parker hears Taylor use on the very first disc. It becomes a kind of motto or motif that recurs, sometimes inverted, sometimes shrunk into a single, fast chord, throughout the set like a tiny quantum of energy. Oxley similarly uncovers ideas that reflect some of the piano's tonal shapes and uses them to coax Taylor along, as if saying: 'You've told us that... what need? What need? Taylor has never been pushed along as ruthlessly as here and it's to his credit that he maintains an unstoppable flow of ideas.

There is scarcely a sound, phrase, chord or scalar shape on these CDs that Taylor has not played before. The miracle is the speed of assemblage. And miracle it is. It's hard not to listen to these sides in awe.

#### DOUBLE HOLY HOUSE

NRF 55 CD 1990

This isn't exactly the Cecil Taylor CD to buy your grandmother but it has a quiet beauty that makes it one of the most accessible of his recent recordings. Overdubbed with speech and percussion, it builds slowly from a limp piano introduction that sees Taylor demarcate areas of the keyboard and adjoining harmonics that will emerge much more robustly in the long codas that follows his recitation. Unusually, this is a studio artefact, rather than a real-time record of a performance, but Taylor assembles his elements seamlessly, much as he does in live performance where the agglutinative, free-associating method that has been his mainstay from *Line Structures to Chimpanzees* is deployed too quickly for the ears. Magnificent, strange and easily beautiful, the perfect illustration of an approach to time that is not linear but like the inner surface of a sphere where every point is equally visible and reachable from every other point.

#### THE WILLISAU CONCERT

INTAKT 073 CD 2000

Paul Valéry said that the first line came from God; the poet's skill was in matching it with one of his own. One feels that strongly listening to Taylor play on this Sunday afternoon set in Switzerland. The opening tone seems like a natural event, unwillied and spontaneous. Everything that follows is an intensely human encounter. There is a small technical point to be made here. For a change, Taylor had the opportunity to play not a Steinway but his preferred Bösendorfer Imperial, 97 keys rather than the iconic 88, and a proportionate increase in resonant space. Taylor dislikes the Steinway's aptitude for playing itself, here he had to work and you can sense the few inches of extra reach required to touch every key. Though by no means one of his most intense, it's a markedly physical performance.

#### PAUL PLIMLEY & JOHN OSWALD/

#### MARILYN CRISPELL/CECIL TAYLOR

#### COMPILITE

VICTO 74 88CD 2000

This is the set that very nearly never happened. Taylor's piano into Victoriaville, Canada for the closing concert of the 2000 Festival De Musique Actuelle was late and the crowd looked likely to be denied the chance to hear him follow his presumed despatch. Marilyn Crispell onstage for a solo double bill. Festival organiser Michel Lévesque found pianist Paul Plimley and saxophonist John Oswald in the crowd and threw them onstage to kill time. The two Canadians did more than that, turning an impromptu set that would have graced any festival.

Once it was clear Taylor was on his way, Marilyn Crispell went on and played one of her quietest and most gently lyrical sets ever, a mixture of freely improvised pieces and Annette Peacock compositions. Taylor arrived and without further drama played five pieces of decreasing duration, from the mighty 'Congress' down to the miniature 'Gone'. Even without the anecdotal support, her stage presence is palpable. It's not the least measure of Cecil Taylor's importance that he combines music of the most demanding sort with the charisma of a rock or movie star. Time has always been his servant rather than his master. He may not be able to control the time that dominates airline schedules but once onstage he gently inhabits a piano of instantaneous moments, where 'ancient' and 'modern' are secondary characteristics, colour and cross rather than fundamental form.

There is more to the story, and it's far from over. Taylor's reflexes may have slowed a fraction and the fires may be banked down. In their place, though, are wisdom and ease of address. At any given moment the entire range of his past work is open and available. There is no more powerful voice at work today and because of that, for all they might say about Marilyn Crispell or Matthew Shipp, there is no 'school of Taylor'. Cecil Taylor is one and himself. □

# Charts

## Playlists from the outer limits

### Nothing 15

**Hoel Alkohol**  
"Reel" from Reel (Walter + Winkie)  
**Luc Perrin**  
"The Last Auto Filter" from *Replay* (Reel) (H&M)  
**Alvin Laster**  
"Nothing Is Real" from *Nothing Is Real* (Winged)  
**HP Lovecraft featuring Reel Noname**  
"Mister's Boy" from *HP Lovecraft 3* (Phlegm)  
**The Pugz**  
"Nothing" from *Reel* (Fantasy)  
**Bastisquon**  
"Inside Areas Where Nothing's Defined" from *Reel* (H&M) (Reel) (5)  
**John Petey + Cat De Sac**  
"Nothing" from *The Ephydium Of Glans Jones* (Thirsty Cat)  
**Han Grawd**  
"Nothing" from *Decapitated* (Grunefest)  
**Sam Re**  
Nothing Is (H&M)  
**Milton Graves Percussion Ensemble**  
"With Some Misgivings"  
"Nothing" from *Milton Graves Percussion Ensemble* (Gallie)  
**Carta Blanca**  
"Nothing" from *Tequel Appentis* (GOM)  
**Peter Brötzmann**  
"No Nothing" from *No Nothing* (FMP)  
**Martin Crimp/Gary Prentoski/Presto Motios**  
"Nothing... Was Anyways" from *Nothing Ever Was* (Cotter) (5)  
**John Cage**  
"Lecture On Nothing, For Speaker" from *Cello*  
"What Lecture On Nothing" (Kontext)  
**Hans-Joachim Kühn**  
"Wikin" from *Japanese Masterpieces For The Skatalites* (Skatalites)

Compiled by Piotr Huperek and Leniwe Tsarini  
Label: DJ Lo-Fi during a round and vinyl installation of the Imaginary Soundtracks Productions at BLOCs, Athens, Greece. [phuperek@hotmail.com](mailto:phuperek@hotmail.com)  
[www.blofi.gr/007](http://www.blofi.gr/007)

### Charmed 15

**Pauline Olsson with Stuart Dempster & Persepolis**  
"Lover (Sister)" (Sister)  
"Momo 10" (Tauri)  
**Bernard Parmegiani**  
"Le Crâne Du Monde" (BNA/GRM)  
**David Toop**  
"Guitar Dog" from *Rebel Boon* (Hayward/Galaxy)  
**Erkki Kurenniemi**  
"On Of Material"  
**Ulfers Rönnqvist**  
"Austromer Liner" (Empreintes Digitales)  
**Olavo Yosuke & Martin Tétreault**  
"31 Statements (Antarctic Magneticpoles)"  
**Hildegard Westerkamp**  
"Tadpoles" (Tadpoles)  
**Scott Smalewood**  
"Desert Winds (Deep Listening)"  
**Priscilla López**  
"La Serie 62" (Anclor V-2281)  
**Steve Reich**  
"Pendulum Music" (NPR-4)  
**John Cage**  
"432 Hz, 440 Hz, Earth"  
**Seppo Mustonen**  
"Three And Two" (Kuusamo)  
**Alvin Laster**  
"Music For Alpha Waves, Assisted Percussion And Automated Coded Relays" (Sleekta/Rehearsal)  
  
Compiled by Piotr Huperek, Leniwe Tsarini, Label: DJ Lo-Fi during a round and vinyl installation of the Imaginary Soundtracks Productions at BLOCs, Athens, Greece. [phuperek@hotmail.com](mailto:phuperek@hotmail.com)  
[www.blofi.gr/007](http://www.blofi.gr/007)

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**Brandimayr/Daleedder/Henneth/Slewert**  
"Die Instabilität Der Symmetrie" (DeG/Groß)  
**Traxpl**  
"Higher My Friend (Hot Hot)"  
**Steinbrüchel**  
"Circa 1940"  
**Günter Müller**  
"Eight Hours Of Silence (For 4 Ears)"  
**Truck Meets Jet Arlbeck**  
"1+3+1 (Slope)"  
**Possenz**  
"Love (Sister)" (Haus/Touch)  
**Osamu Yoshihiko & Nobuhiko Takekawa**  
"Turbulents And Computers" (Headz)  
**Elaine Radigue**  
"Advice HB (State Of The Elemental)"  
**Taylor Deupree & Christopher Wiggins**  
(Anteuphony)  
**Werner Darschkow/Peter Haußgeser**  
"Seethiko Mikros Tibury"  
"Amen" (Tibury)  
**Morton Feldman**  
"late Works With Clarinet" (Model)  
**Toshihiko Nakamura**  
"No Input Mixing Board 3" (Aoshell)  
**Bluebird**  
"Two Locations" (Lieb)  
**Chicago Underground Trio**  
"Sister" (Hellt Jocelyn)  
**Stephan Harbeck/Zafarudeen Mensi/**  
**Jack Schmid/Timeless**  
"Quality Hand" (Kontext)

Compiled by Piotr Huperek, [www.list-15.com](http://www.list-15.com)

### The Office Ambience

**Animal Collective**  
"Bung Tung (Fat Cat)"  
**Versus Castello**  
"Honey And Wax (Honey)"  
**AMM**  
"At The Roundhouse (Anonakou)"  
**Death Corset Caw**  
"DC Corset Caw (Deathcorset Untitled)"  
**Verluse**  
"Radio Marconi (Sublime Frequencies)"  
**Trío x 3**  
"Him Jax Morning Boden Boden 2002 (Haklog)"  
**Death Carter/Morgan Craft/Britt Byer**  
"Mysticism (Evangelist)"  
**Polka Arakakus**  
"Mother I'm Asian (N & Research Digest)"  
**Mark Cuneengham & Jacob Brannenay Heyark**  
"Astrology (Spooky Sound)"  
**Teknai Akylyme & Jazul Van Wassen**  
"Papaya" (Papaya) (W-Wave)  
**The Shitlife Sistas**  
"Ain't The Shitlife" (Family Vineyard)  
**Velvete**  
"Pork Chop 3" (Tengraph)  
**Aranea Dene**  
"Ling Chaser (Anonakou)"  
**RP Collin**  
"Tilting/Windshift" (CD Baby CD-R)  
**Sister Busho-Jangbaas**  
"Busho (Shrigne Atmashit Audio House)"

Compiled by The Wim Sound System

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# Reviews



Cara Bozulich reviewed in *Soundcheck*

## Directory

Since information on artists, labels and distributors is now easily accessible through Internet search engines like Google, we have decided to discontinue the Directory. Contact details for many labels can also be found in the Links archive at [www.thewire.co.uk](http://www.thewire.co.uk)

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# Soundcheck

This month's selected CDs, vinyl and singles



Locks 'n' smiles: Spektrum

## SPEKTRUM ENTER THE... SPEKTRUM PLAYHOUSE PLAYING CD

Conventional pop history tends to leap straight from The Sex Pistols to Duran Duran, smacking en route at muttons and legwarmers and the other naff foibles of the early 80s. The word "retro" is often applied to the ongoing revaluation of the early 80s, while the achievements of the immediate post-punk era have for too long remained airbrushed out of existence.

That, however, applies that it was an era from which "we" moved on. That's simply not the case. The spirit of the early 80s was not superseded; it simply lapsed. How that happened is a story for another day, but suffice to say that 1984 was the year in which, with painful sincerity, the après-garde of U2, Annie Lennox and Phil Collins stamped their hegemony on pop/rock like a boot on a face for what felt like it might be forever.

From Grace Jones to 23 Skidoo, PiL to No Wave, Suicide to Biting Tongues, Ripi, Ripi & Panic to Cabaret Voltaire, Gang Of Four to Kraftwerk, this was among the most fertile, mature, rich and advanced periods in the history of rock and pop alchemy. There was colour, joieusement, dressing up, posing, nads on the pop charts and much pissing off of the rock roundheads. Yet this music was as serious as your life. Racism and gender lines blurred, the waters were spiked, brawlers came down (only to be emphatically re-erected later). There were fleeting moments when there was an open road between the avant garde and the mainstream - Sun Ra was on the cover of the NME, for heaven's sake.

The subsequent beige blandness into which all of this experimentalism congealed represented a devolution. The adventures of the early 80s, the ideas suggested but abused by a next generation of cod-

soul opportunists and then utterly forgotten in the 90s era of coulent laddishness, remain alive and unfinished. So, start again like it's 1983? Why not? That's not nostalgia - it's to argue that most of the last 20 years, in pop music at least, have been a chronic mistake.

So we come to Spektrum, London based avant funksters who revolve around the nucleus of vocalist Lola Olafseye and classically trained Gabriele Olegavich, whose shifting electronic backbeats show more than a dilettante's grasp of electroacoustics and musique concrète, especially on the 26-second interlude "Spectr-o-trum", which comes on like a funkified up extract of Ligeti's *Artikulation*. Those only familiar with the cooing pleasures of the single "Kinda Now" will be rocked back by *Enter The... Spektrum*. Those unfamiliar with the group at all might initially be tempted to sniff at the influences - Doves and The Sits here, a suspicion of A Certain Ratio there, the shock metamorphoses of Ripi, Ripi & Panic everywhere. This album, however, is not about derivation but about distillation. What's reassembled with cubist concentration here are the best elements - dispensed with are the odd moment of Gothic vacuity, the rough naivety, the lemon-sucking jerkiness, the technological backwardness of that era. *Enter The Spektrum*... is re-armed for the 21st century, the only century in which this album could have been made.

"Radio", the opener, advances over a halting rhythm with remorseless, loping aces of toxic synth - a rarer remainder of an era when synths felt like sinister harbingers of an uncertain future than mere sonic palliatives. Olafseye's vocals, meanwhile, are coquettish and scratching to the point of paranoid dementia. Her hyper-vigilance yanks you out of the warm, somnambulant brine of years of Ambient/Techno. As she sings on "Freakbox", "No

more fantasies for me..." This album is as sexy and brutal as the facts of life.

"Breaker" announces itself with the sort of Old School AOR/Shirelback-style white funk bass that might have become an overused signifier by the mid-80s, but after a long moratorium it sounds fresh again. "I don't need a lover, I need a heartbreaker," growls Olafseye, in vocal waves processed and treated to varying degrees, from feline to robotic, a fractured, predatory Army Of Hens. Olegavich's toolkit of synth devices meanwhile are coiled and cobre-like, shattering the successive layers of glazing which separate the music from the listener, resulting in moments of discomfiting but not unwelcome intimacy. "Music Alchemy" spirals off from another funk base, morphing, dying away and rearing back up with snekkelike and sensuous menace. This is music that, for good or ill, creeps amorously and hungrily all over you. Again, Olegavich's sonic matter, from burgeoning pitter-patter beats that attack tangentially, to rolling funky squabbles, are the synthetic stuff of now, or even next year, all new additions to the index of funk metals - the malfunctioning judger of "Country Locks" likewise.

As the sun sets on this set, it begins to take on different hues, without slackening. "Listen Girl", whose feminist affirmation is once again all too redundant of a bygone, pre-RHM era, is jazzily infected, with wisps of going blowing balmily back and forth, while "Lychee Juice" is a strange fruit, flavoured joy, topped with a whirpool of keyboards. Be sure also not to switch off after "Low Down". Following a lengthy pause, it contains a hidden workout which amounts to a summary, a flexing of all the musical virtues Spektrum display here. They are a multiplication of, rather than an addition to the avant funk game. Spektrum are what happens next. □

**Revisionist avant funksters step back two decades to take a leap into tomorrow. By David Stubbs**

**OSKAR AICHINGER****SYNAPSIS**

BETWEEN THE LINES B102/94/PA10/199 CD BY ANDY HAMILTON  
Born in Austria in 1948, until 1995 pianist and keyboard player Oskar Aichinger taught in school – at least that's what the wretched Google translation of his Website seems to say, adding that he is a "Residence composer and executive musician with emphasis jazz in Vienna activity". He's recorded before for the Frankfurt based label Between the Lines, directed by Franz Koglmüller, and To Touch A Desert Soul from 2001 was an intriguing, enigmatic release of very self-consciously European Improv – complex, unsettling music which didn't quite catch this listener's imagination.

Aichinger's work has been described as "artful delicacy... aftertaste leaving an impression", and Desert Soul reflected an ordinance of self-delusion. Synapses is jazzier, yet haunting also. Aichinger's lucid keyboard work mixes with Stefan Krenner's computer generated sounds plus the rhythmic section of bassist Achim Tang and drummer Paul Sklepik. All the relatively brief pieces – 11 songs on a 46 minute album – are by the leader and not a note is wasted. There are a great variety of approaches within the essentially cool (indeed, colder than cool) ethos. Each track focuses on a single idea – Light-like polytones on "Cannet", prepare piano dissonances on "Meed No Umbrella" – and explores it singlemindedly. The very easy "The Zone" sounds like a music box plus vinyl scratches. "Inside From Outside" sets up a ferocious assault from the drums, then transmutes it in a skeletal, ethereal medium. The opening track is named, for obscure philosophical reasons, after Clarence the cossedey lion from the TV series Dakar. Aichinger encourages listeners to make their own "moves of the mind". He is clearly an exercising musician to watch.

**GREG ASHLEY****MEDICINE FUCK DREAM**  
BIRDMAN BMB055 CD

BY MARC MARTINS

Greg Ashley's music is seethingly specific like a nightmare that's not scary because you know you're asleep. Medicine Fuck Dream, the first record from this young San Francisco via Houston transplant, has a drawsy intensity with Ashley's hoarse voice and wispy guitar sleeve-pulling through the hypnotic fog. All the fathers of bedroom-folk – Syd Barrett, Skip Spence, Roky

Ericson – get invoked, and Ashley doesn't always add to these influences, but he does insist on them often enough to suggest that future efforts (Ashley's band The Gris Gris already have an album planned) will be even more enticing.

Medicine Fuck Dream opens with its "Kleen Loses Candy", a childlike piece of rhyme that rattles with typhic pangs and Ashley's citharing vocals, sounding like he's trying to sing his hallucinations to sleep. Ashley's voice is setted with mewb through most of the album, which adds to the haunting dreaminess, but it's his patient intonations that weigh down one's eyelids most. Even on "She", when the studio effects are shown away, his controlled breathings remain powerfully mesmerizing. In fact, Ashley's skilful vocal lulling levels that of Ben Cheesy, whose shadowy voice made See Dejans' Of Admiration's recent Compacts such a stirring alliance.

Ashley does skip from dreaminess into lassitude at points. "I Said, 'There Are Lonely Days'" is a hokily kleukie-la-la-la-la title that's too Try Tim to handle, and the cover of Hank Williams' "Lost Highway" is unapprising, despite Ashley's chilling voice. That's about it for Medicine Fuck Dream's rough patches, though the remainder is smooth, sleeping, floating through the churning "Mona Rider", the achingly lyrical "Lisa Lisa", and the hairy moon of "Legs Cisco Col". The latter song's final line, "Baby baby we could be dead or yin' in bed", should be the album's subtitle, since jiving fat and motionless is the best way to experience Medicine Fuck Dream singlemindedly. The very easy "The Zone" sounds like a music box plus vinyl scratches. "Inside From Outside" sets up a ferocious assault from the drums, then transmutes it in a skeletal, ethereal medium. The opening track is named, for obscure philosophical reasons, after Clarence the cossedey lion from the TV series Dakar. Aichinger encourages listeners to make their own "moves of the mind". He is clearly an exercising musician to watch.

**BABA ZULA & MAD PROFESSOR**  
PSYCHEBEELY DANCE MUSIC  
DUBLIN CITY DM021 CD/DL  
BY BRIAN MARLEY

Turkish label Dubkirk's mission statement, to create "a brand new World Music" sound with a touch of jazz", could have been dashed by Bill Laswell to describe his operations during the last two decades. The similarities don't end there. Oya Erkaya Ayman, electric bass guitarist with Istanbul based quartet Baba Zula, has an appropriately Laswell-like sound, heavy, fat and ripe. It fits extremely well with what are, on Psychedelic Dance Music compositions employing elements of the Turkish folk tradition such as gusul, takam and basuk, but given a YXN update.

The group convened in 1996 to provide the soundtrack for Dennis Zarni's cult film *Somerset In A Coffin*. They went on to produce music for theatre, and released two albums

drawn from this material. But for Psychedelic Dance Music, Baba Zula have upped the ante. Here they play what they call "oriental dub", which marries its experimentalism with extreme danceability. Two of the 15 songs are based on traditional Turkish melodies, the rest are self-penned. Alongside Turkish instruments such as darbuka, def, finger cymbals and soz, they employ samplers, turntables, keyboards, synthesizers and toys, as well as the aforementioned bass guitar. The music touches on Techno, drum 'n' bass, and much else that gets stoned clubbers moving on dancefloors worldwide, but without compromising its essential Turkishness.

Key among the album's guest performers is Canadian lyricist/briar Bensa MacGrimmon, whose studies in Balkan music, however ingenious, don't guarantee that we'll be mistaken for a Turkish singer. But this plays to the advantage of the group, which is in the business of musical idiom-busting and free international exchange. Having Mad Professor add dub highlights to the mix was a good strategy. His subtle use of echo on both song and spoken lines accentuate the fleet, percussion-driven rhythms to occasional delirious effect.

**BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY**  
SINGS GREATEST PALACE MUSIC  
DOMINO WGD140P CD

**WILL OLDHAM**  
SEAFARERS MUSIC  
DRIVE CITY DC001 CD/DL  
BY MATT FIFTYTHREE

From the falsetto opening chords of "New Partner" and the footloose swing of "Ohio River Boat Song" to the creamy lit of "Gulf Shores", this new anthology of sonorities from the so-called Prince of alt country swaggers unashamedly drifts into the terrain of heartwarming ballads and torch songs. This is less rocking chair on a windy porch, more Nashville plucks vs Palm Beach sunset. Sure, Will Oldham's ascendant voice still quivers only like a mournful trill in a John Westie Harding-esque Dylan. However, in this experimental reworking of Oldham's work as Palace, it comes swathed in strings, fiddles, trumpets, piano, the whine of pedal steel and the odd sirenphone – a chorus of friends and associates.

Downbeat heartaches play out across a landscape of restaurants, bars and beaches, existential angst mellowed into Country anthems

But as the anthology unfolds, Oldham palls quite different shades of "Bernie" out of the bag. "Wages, Queen Of Somewhere" is foot-tappingly catchy but "More Brother Blues", with its lines "We allow slow violence to prove us *unapproachable*", powered by an ornate punistic undertow, shines far more darkly. Nothing is predictable here. "The Beach Chon" – one of Oldham's attempts at a never-lyric – contributes to brouhaha like "All Along the Watchtower" but turns out to be measured, folksy, grand and warm. For "No More Working Blues", however, he revert to violin, bass and piano, for a hushed, plaintive and ultimately东北风 viols.

Jawty capers such as "I Am A Cinematographer" mingle with the rugged dilapidation of "West Palm Beach", or the rambling strut of "Horses" with its shades of Johnny Cash. Good, singalong tunes all.

Seafarers Music is quite a different kind of gem. It's the soundtrack to Jason Mapses' documentary exploration of male solitude and transcendence as seen through the eyes of four sailors on shore in Rotterdam, the world's largest port. "Often, in the way of lonely people, their thoughts just go round and round their heads with no outlet" is Mapses' description of his protagonists, and Oldham, who liked the film enough to provide a thematic instrumental for each person's story, captures that feel of downtime and aimlessness in a set of dirring, moody acoustic instruments that were improvised over the footage, along with Paul Doherty and David Brod on electric guitar and bass. "Sepulchre" begins like a lulling, finger-picking style with slightly Moyses overtones – like Jimi Fajohn playing Dooley Graham – while the other players shadow the narrative closely to give the effect less of harmonies than a single, multi-layered, nesting methods line. "Lore" continues in a similar vein – little melodies plucked in octaves, line winding in slow circling coils, the awaiting drag of fingers across the fretboard, a foamy weirdness. "Boys" has the springy feel of a delicate post-rock instrumental but the final track returns to a duo of halo of self-absorption, doled down to a near vacant glimmer.

**CARLA BOZULICH**  
I'M GONNA STOP KILLING  
DESTITUTION STAR BUILDERS ST003 CD  
BY GREG KOPF

"I'm shooting all over my guitar" mutters Carla Bozulich during a live recording of a set at San Francisco's Anochea club. "I'm sorry that's gross. I try to be a lady." Well, whatever it takes to

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Organic mutters: Tom Recchion

### TOM RECHION I LOVE MY ORGAN BERGMAN BIRMELE CD

The latest collection by composer and improvisor Tom Recchion – its title a family onomatopoeic double entendre – is an ode to electric keyboards past and present. It is also a long overdue release from a composer whose work is born equally of playful spontaneity and a deeply rigorous absorption in music history.

Californian in the best sense of the term, Recchion's output shares appealing qualities with the work of others from the Land of Sunshine. His evocative titles shy away from easy interpretation, just as their melodies refuse pat resolution, just unlike Harold Budd's writing for piano. The simulation of unusual and unnatural acoustic spaces recalls the work of instrument inventor and pedal steel guitarist Chas Smith. And of course, when repetition and subtle variation are at the root of one's enterprise, the barrehouse delay unit keyboards of Terry Riley are never far away as a reference point.

As with its 1996 predecessor *Chaotica*, the majority of the pieces which make up *I Love My Organ* are live improvisations cut directly to tape in the late 80s. Several of them have been subsequently augmented and remastered by Recchion. Though their means of production are similar, the new album benefits from expanded bandwidth and the addition of new pieces in the composer's toolkit, most notably the sampler, a source of rhythmic inspiration for Recchion. Its innate tendency to shrink or stretch the overall time of a given sound when pitched along the keyboard is exploited in a subset of tracks titled "RIFS" (Rhythmic Improvisations for Sampler).

Recchion's work has the giddiness and vitality of Pop Art, yet remains untainted by camp or disingenuous impulses. His "FAT (RIFS #3)" is devoted to Ferrante & Teicher, the mid-century

keyboard duo who are never cited when the honour roll of exotica is called. Yet the ingenuity of Recchion's improvised triggering of piano samples evinces an honest affection for them, as his restless arpeggiations roil from key to key, finally settling down into a slightly flattened groove. The whirling piano riff then explodes into the shock stereo spread that has become a Recchion trademark, prior spinning down to an abrupt coda.

In the early 70s, Recchion worked at the legendary Pooh-Bah record shop in his native Pasadena. His vinyl obsessed friends haunted the store – in this time group formed The Los Angeles Free Music Society, within whose ranks Recchion initiated his tape and keyboard improvisations. They were early champions of 1950s exotica, showing peasant enthusiasm for the lush orchestrations of Martin Denny and Lee Baxter. *On / Love My Organ*, the consummate weirdness of Space Age Bachelor Pad music informs "Ecotopia", its theremin gisano and sudden key changes bringing to mind the Baxter scores affixed to American prints of Italian horror films like *Black Sunday* and *Bava Blood*.

"Trucker's Carousel" also skirts the verges of parody. As its bed loop fights the need to parse its beats in a logical fashion, a strangely familiar melody spills from the title keyboard. Though recognisable only in the holographic sense, where a shard contains the essence of the complete work, this piece appears to invoke Mancini's "Peter Gunn Theme", or more likely its bastard offspring, the opening theme to the mid-60s television sitcom *The Munsters*. In fact, *I Love My Organ*'s booklet contains a quote from Herman Munster, probably not found in Bartlett's, alongside a remark uttered by the late children's video host, Mr Rogers, the latter possibly earning a place in Ivor Cutler's heart with his thought that "real revelation comes from silence".

Upon hearing *Chaotica*, Another fellow Californian,

**Richard Henderson is  
enchanted by the sound  
of a space age bachelor  
playing with himself**

Terry Riley, dubbed Tom Recchion "the loop king". Recchion returns the favour here, dedicating "Terry Riley In Rome" to the pioneering minimalist. An ascertive structure built from a jaunty accordion riff, guitar and hi-hat cymbal, the piece is crowned with blunted organ chords, their timbre a spot-on tribute to the sonic signature of Riley's best known work, *A Rainbow In Curved Air*. The track conjures such wonderful imagery, positing its bearded subject driving a Vespa down the Via Veneto to a reggae rhythm, slogging on the brakes as the paparazzi descend.

Although both *I Love My Organ* and its predecessor *Chaotica* concern with giddy abandon through much of their respective running times, each has at its core an oasis of quiet. Four haunting, contemplative airs formed a suite within *Chaotica* – here, the extended "Narcotic" generates its own field of stillness. With minimal harmonic movement and an overall textural coarseness resembling an Eva Hesse wall hanging, "Narcotic" rises up to its programmatic title, a loosely tuned "dog as melody" which grabs the clock by its hands and forces it to surrender.

The booklet art (a reminder of Recchion's day job as graphic designer for record labels) sports a hand coloured image with the subtitle "Entrance To Dreamland, Coney Island, NY". An interesting coincidence, as "Narcotic" could hardly replace the existing soundtrack for California artist Bruce Conner's film *Tales The 5:10 To Dreamland*, its copper hued nostalgia and ingenious manipulation of found elements a perfect match for the echoing marvels of the musical sleight of hand that is *I Love My Organ*. The album ends with another, possibly unintended allusion to the composer's horse turf. As though cues by the narrative voice of David Tippin wondering "How do you suppose they were able to change us into dogs?", we hear barking in the distance – Tom Recchion's Pet Sounds. □

graze those strings. There follows a fabulously grisly improvisation on her former group Geraldine Fibbers' "Outside Of Town". If it begins tentatively with a plucked in Country fiddle glibly opening up that snot-encrusted guitar through a weathered electric curtain, their strings are soon knotting in a silencing embrace, oblivious to the howling despair of the wind-battered baldie to come.

For anyone who first stumbled over Braxton on last year's Red-Hotted Stranger and found her Country waltzing with Willie Nelson's 1975 concept album a touch too stately, her European-only, largely live compilation, *My Gonna Stop Killing*, is a welcome revelation of the not-so-laidback tendencies she was wont to display in her other incarnations with alt. Country rockers Geraldine Fibbers and her Scornilla duo with ex-guitar partner Nels Cline. Cline is passing here, along with violinist Jenny Scheinerman and Carlo Kehlstedt, drummer Scott Amendola and bassist Ted Sickertoo, among others, pitching in behind Braxton's earthy, oil-rich vocals on club dates in San Francisco and Tucson.

Moving from the opening pair of polished studio tracks – "Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain" and her duet with Nelsen, "Can I Sleep In Your Arms", both from *Red-Hotted Stranger* – into a live version of Neil Young and Crazy Horse's "Running Dry", you feel like a 55th-collared Easterner on a first trip out west. The bumpy yet exhilarating ride doesn't get any smoother, but Braxton torches it up tenderly – especially on her rathouse take of another *Stranger* song, "Remember Me". It closes with her heartburned cover of Marianne Faithfull's "Times Square", where you can hear what Lydia Lunch meant when she wrote, "When Bozzolini sings, it's with the hope that a tiny glimmer of light will transpire through the awesomes, seeing us off from our darkest nights".

#### ANTHONY BRAXTON NINETET (YOSHIS) 1997: VOLUME 2 LED 0003583 200CD

BY BRIAN MORTON

Anthony Braxton is one of those rare artists for whom no terms of critical reference exceed larger than the terms established by the work itself. These two discs continue the documentation of an astonishing six night, 12 set residency at as Dekkard club six years ago, all of it devoted to the performance practice of Ghost Trance Music, a set of "composers" numbered 207 to 218.

Some Day's peerlessly clear silences don't set out to explain the definition of these whirling compulsive pieces from the original eight note cell, but does firmly nail down the beside-the-pointness of talking about "composers" in Braxton's case. This is the point at which improvisation and composition merge inextricably and the results are utterly compelling.

The paradox of Day's essay is that it runs a similarly long, equally complicated riff on some hitherto unexpected connections between Anthony Braxton and Miles Davis. Doubtlessly they are as unflinching as could be. Braxton is much more likely to turn up in a patched cardigan and solated glasses than in paradesilk karmen pants and space boots. But Day teases out some intriguing parallels, which run all the way from the nimble format of Birth Of The Cool to the proto-Ghost Trance Music of "Miss Russ The Voodoo Down". And he also gets intriguingly hung up on "Out Of Nowhere", which is the tune Braxton master Wayne Marsh had just finished playing when the guests came back to redeem him.

It's worth leaving Day's note before setting down to *Composers* 209 and 209. The connections he makes may sound improbable, but they help restore a tinge of familiarity to what might otherwise seem forbiddingly alien and abstract music. The woodwind line-up – Braxton, Brandon Evans, James Fei, Julian Moates, Andre Vida and JD Parran – is only part of the story. Joe Fonda's bass, Kevin Norton's drums, marimba and vibraphone and, more unexpectedly, Kevin Dorn's electric guitar create a very particular space within the Trance in which the dynamics of the music and its paradoxical diction, both linear and quantum, deliver astonishing amounts of musical information. *Composition* No 208, which features a Greek amphora in its graphic title, is the more spacious and classical of the two. It has its awkward moments and some superfluous passages. Over its almost 60 minute duration, though, it impinges a staggeringly rich musical language, and provides the ideal riddle for *Composition* 210.

Whether it was recorded at the second set or the same evening or on another occasion isn't specified but it follows on magnificently and takes the whole Ghost Trance philosophy to a new level. Here the graphic element is an old fashioned steam radio and what look like turning keys, an evocative image for the soundworld of 210. The level of interaction

between the horns is uncanny and the overall sonority here is probably the most beautiful thing you'll find in the entire Braxton canon. There are passages that stand out, like O'Neil's scrawled solo feature and some knotted, intricate measures on low-pitched clarinets, baritone and bass saxophone, but these are subsidiary to the whole.

I've had my moments of cynicism. I was even guilty some years back of rating a speed performance of *Composition* 84/6 for side-saxophone, bells and medical defibrillator, the putative work of one Tony Braxton-Hicks, which is a name that will only make sense to expectant parents who also au fait. The real *Composition* No 84/3 seems an even more likely and enticing prospect, but Day's essay is already with us. Braxton's music, unlike Davis', doesn't blandly change and "develops". It unfolds.

#### DAVID BYRNE GROWN BACKWARDS Nonesuch 79656 2CD

BY DEEPA DARYAL

David Byrne has assembled an impressive array of global music during his idiosyncratic musical career and through his *Music* Box label. Often, however, his well of colourful inspirations could bleed together into a dull marr, failing to match the crisp, bright edge of his early work. Although Byrne's music has mellowed considerably as he's aged, his voice retains the same edge it had when he fronted Talking Heads – as agitated, anxious quality that can give even the most happy-go-lucky song an undercut of trepidation. Part of the power of his signature vocal delivery is that it has always sounded uncommodious with both itself and with the world at large. In Byrne's latest, *Grown Backwards*, he applies his queening voice to open, with intriguing, unearthy results. Amid the quirky collection of string-bending pop songs are two arias – "Un Di Felice, Esteso", from Verdi's *La Traviata*, and a duet with Rufus Wainwright for Bizet's *Au Fond Du Temple Sain*.

"The Other Side Of This Life", a lovely slice of orchestral pop, sounds light and carefree but the lyrics reveal a heart full of satire beneath the confectionery: "All of my worries are gone". Beautiful arias appear at my side/An corporate sponsors will act as my guides." "Empire", which sounds eerily like it could be an early Talking Heads B-side, is a political job aimed squarely at the squares in power – "What's good for business, is good for us all."

Byrne deadpans. "Dialog Box" matches meanders on computers with a idly swinging funkiness. Byrne's obscurities are always subtle – there's no heavy handed jousts, just snatches of witty commentary here and there, laced with coded references. The album's only real miss is "Try Apocalypso", where the verses are delivered in a codette, taking bordering on napping, which sounds so stanchioned-up that it almost becomes an unkindest parody of itself.

Much of the rest is pleasant, but ultimately forgettable. A cover of Lambchop's "The Man Who Loved Beer", for instance, is certainly pretty but adds little to the original. Overall, *Grown Backwards* is a worthy addition to Byrne's sprawling oeuvre, while never reaching the heights of his greatest work.

#### COMETS ON FIRE FIELD RECORDINGS FROM THE SUN SWEET NOTHING SMC0069 CD

BY JOHN MULVEY

Blodied ties to the free folk underground give little indication as to how *Comets On Fire*, a quartet from Santa Cruz, actually sound. There are few shamans, chimes and distant warblings of John Fahey here instead, *Comets On Fire* specialises in a kind of wildy overdriven acid rock. Even when Ben Cheary, from *Si Admits*, steps up to provide pastoral acoustic guitar on "The Unseen", his efforts are slowly overwhelmed by crimson feedback.

For the most part, *Comets On Fire's* core members – Ben Cheary (bass), Noel Hornsby (drums) and oscillations), Ethan Miller (vocals/guitar), Ulises Belizier (drums) – act concretely like firebreakers at the low-end. A spectrum of cosmic bark and distant drum noise opens "Beneath The Ice Age", but the meditative air is soon gleefully obliterated by slashing, whirling space rock, picked somewhere between Blue Cheer and Hawkwind. A more recent reference point would be Manilow's *Mellow Out*, and Makoto Kubawato that took an unapologetically rockish load of volume, wilely any distortion to its ruthless conclusion.

Originally released on Ba Da Bing in 2002, *Field Recordings From The Sun* similarly roils in miasma, a sense that speakers are built to be blown apart. Miller's voice's are subjected to so much echo and crude manipulation that he sounds trapped in a wind tunnel, while his fellow guitarists Cheary and Tim Green (from the

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### VARIOUS

#### THE WORLD OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Ocora C9816/16187 7XCD

A big development in World Music in the 90s was the exploration of popular and urban forms of traditional music – see Andy Kershaw, the *Globalstyle* label and *Rough Guides* passion. My god, even *Mojo* magazine recently ran a piece on 1970s Cambodian pop. Then of course there's the global fusion, World beat, and all those bold crossover projects and collaborations, from the inspired to the inane. All the has left Radio France's Ocora label looking decidedly old school – serious albums (for example) of classical Burmese orchestras, beautifully recorded, with sleeve notes tending to the academic, and never a whiff of corrupting Western influences. But you can bet all those fusion producers have plenty of Ocora releases on their shelves.

Ocora's heyday was probably the 70s and 80s, but today they are still adding to a magnificent archive of over 300 albums. The present seven CD set is hardly a triumph of design and packaging, more a case of bundling a load of compilation CDs into a flimsy box and hoping for the best, but with a collection like Ocora's, the best is largely what you get. The albums are ordered geographically: North Africa & West Asia, South Asia, East Asia, South East Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. Only the last is new – the other compilations were issued originally in 1994.

Asia is what Ocora do best, and the first four out of the box maintain a very high standard. South East Asia, mostly recorded by Jacques Brunet, is wonderful throughout, from the pretty Burmese Ramayana song over a dainty harp, to the Javanese marionette theatre music from a village near Bandung. A cascade of Vietnamese zithers flutters like Paraguayan harpe, there's a top-notch Balinese gamelan and a 1964 Cambodian court orchestra, and stirring Laoan melodies are improvised on the large khene mouth organ by Nouthong Phimviphaphone, a

member of the Paris-based Molam Leo group who recorded with John Tchicai.

Raw Shankar kicks off the South Asian set with a semi-classical dham that glows with romantic delicacy. His sister-in-law, Lakshmi Shankar, is a glorious singer – she performs a 16th century mythological love poem by the princess Mini Bai. Instrumentally, there's effortless rhythmic virtuosity from sarod lute master Amjad Ali Khan, and the little known vichitra vina, played by sliding a glass bowl over its strings. From Pakistan the late hero of qawwali, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, sings a 36 minute hymn with flair and devotion.

All of these are eminently listenable, partly because the recording quality is good and the performances outstanding, but also because delicate, restrained tracks have been selected, rather than grandstanding or rough-edged performances. Majid Kahn's Iranian hammered surnar is all shimmering strings and a beautiful scale that stretches the Western ear. Rabbi Moulay's Moroccan Gnawa group is mysterious, shifting veins of song, and Enunen Tannkoru sings a Turkish elegy in does classical style to end accompaniment. Another good point in this collection is that each country is not represented by an obvious choice: from Portugal we hear the fado do combro, a male form of the songs better known in the Lisbon tradition of Amalia Rodrigues. The Algerian track is an instrumental overture, a charming Andalucian reworking of a Turkish composition. This kind of piece reminds us that these dignified, rather classical musics are in fact constantly evolving, reviving and absorbing outside influences.

Among the wacky masters are a handful of real oddities: the tiny curl lute from Turkey, originally played on horseback, is finger-hammered by Tolip Ozkan in a style not a million miles distant from Fred Frith's guitar improvising. A polka from Belgium's Brabant province rings out on the rarely sighted hommpot zither. And the harsh hocketing of the Kauai tulé sounds like nothing on earth – it's handbell

ringing, but done by Amazonian Indians on rainforest bass clarinets.

One of the best known Ocora releases was *Traditional Music Of Burkina*, recorded in 1967, with its thunderous drum ensemble, and much eerie whispering over a bass tree-trunk zither. The latter is included on a strong African selection which moves from the xylophones of Burkina Faso (their resonators buzzing with spiders' webs), via Gambian kora master Jeli Nyama Soso, to the very often amplified sanzas (thumb pianos) of Zaire's All-Powerful Likembé Konono Orchestra. This fierce electric jive is Ocora's one concession to rockin' out.

Europe (Britain is completely unrepresented, but then, this is a French collection) is all French bagpipes and hurdygurdies, Norwegian Hardanger fiddles and racing Romanian cimbaloms, this last featuring the most guttural, most sardonic violin ever. The stunning launeddas of Sardinia's Luigi Lai are here too – three pipes in the mouth, circular breathing, and a dance tune to take the plique off your wisdom teeth.

The final album, from Latin America, represents a decline – the cheesy, show-off accordion from Argentina included here is just not on the same level. Colombian vallenato dancing and Cuban son by Conjunto Segundo rescue the cause, and there is a spirited Huasteca song from Mexico. But the sleeve notes, sketchy at best, collapse at this point into sheer laziness: "More complete information on the music can be found in the notes of the corresponding recordings" is an idiotic and rather mean-spirited thing to write on a compilation. While I'm complaining, there are no pictures of instruments or performers, few dates of recordings, and occasionally musicians are uncredited. And the set's design is feeble. Having said that, it's doubtful whether any other label could have come up with such a glittering array of music to delight the ear and expand the imagination. □

Fucking Champa) appear to be converting teenage amphetamine into experimental capital. *Comets On Fire* are clearly a group in love with the elemental dumbness of garage rock but, unusually are able to its possibilities to. So when they nod to the Stooges (in the utterly fantastic "The Black Poodle"), they do so by mixing Funkadelic-style saxophone squalls into the ecstatic carriage. And when they draw on The MC5, they reference a group who saw rock 'n' roll as a springboard to entrepreneurial absurdism, from the rudimentary romances perveyed by so many less ambitious MC5 followers.

### THE DESERT FATHERS

SPIRITUALITY

THREESPHERES 18012 CD

BY MIKE RABINS

Already released in the USA, this album has attracted some lavish praise, particularly from Rockbottom magazine, which offered the view that Spirituality is the greatest work of art in the past 400 years. On behalf of a number of major figures too dead to contact that assertion, let's just say that it isn't quite. It is, however, undoubtedly a rock record of great originality. The guitar, bass and drums do *the* anything but generic in their moves. The opener "Agnus Dei" is an eerie collage of warbled voices, and although it's far from representative of the record, its blunted edges are also typical of the group's more aridious material. "Fecund" sounds like a power trio declassified — the guitar sets up a circular pattern across the soundfield, into which notes and abstract elements are introduced, giving rise to a subtle smudging of their sound. This carries on through "Life After Life Everlasting", a track based on an eccentric loop that sounds like it's beginning to fry, but is held together by a heavier, incisory loop.

This queasy sound of rock slowly dissolving, particularly on the singulated, yet departed and erotic "Innsmouth", owes something to My Bloody Valentine's *Loveless* and the dark, down-panted psychelia of those shadowy New Zealanders, Baader Space. Vocal lines are melodic yet memorable. "Pitfalls", with its slowed down groove and the refrain "Strong head/Dog head", sees The Desert Fathers exerting a greater grasp on reality. That said, the slow-sustained — veering from concept album narrative to biblical parable — speak the song's protagonist being faced with walking along the top of a wall, with pribbles on either side "scrapping their teeth in the air blearily".

This, the group's debut album, was painstakingly constructed over three years, with Steve Albini and Greg Norman sharing production duties in seven different studios. The only disappointment is its length — a mere 29 minutes, including a deft "odd man" meditation. Thus, it's more of a fascinating peek into a singular soundworld than an epoch-making statement. Maybe we'll have to wait for their next release to see them eclipse the works of Goya and Picasso.

### ROB ELLIS

#### MUSIC FOR THE HOME VOL 2

THE LEAF LABEL 00029 CD

BY MIKE CLARKE

The first instalment of Rob Ellis's *Music For The Home* series was released in 2001 and consisted almost entirely of pieces censored and edited inside a computer. Although *Music For The Home* Vol 2 features compositions that have been similarly processed by way of technology, the inanity of the album is made up of archetypal "live" recordings, collected by Ellis over the last decade.

A self-taught pianist, the Somerset-based Ellis takes a challenging, idiosyncratic approach towards his music. This is evident in his collaborative work (as producer and guest musician for artists such as Manané Faithfull and PI Harvey), but really comes through in his solo projects. He works between the — technically organised and the incidental — hence the oftbeat resonance of his music. It is unassuming that his style has drawn comparisons to the works of Satie and Cage.

Divided into titled sections such as "Three Karmic Studies For Three Pianos" and "Slightly Early Little Piece About Clock Piece", it's interesting to note the twists and turns that Ellis has taken in his compositions through the years. Take the contrast between "15/11/95 (50 Pieces For Free Piano)", with its romantic subheadings such as "Dreaming" and "Starry Sky" and extended cascades of trumbling piano, and "Music For The Home", which was recorded in 2002 and a laden with titles like "Things Around The House I'm Not Familiar With" and "The Empty House". It was, Ellis says, a turbulent period in his domestic life, and this is echoed in the resultant pieces, heady and often tense, though never cluttered.

Ellis's use of concrete techniques applied to domestic recordings is often striking in its simplicity — no more so than on "Church

Opposite", which punctuates the dramatic impetus of the album with two minutes of church bells. Ellis's delightful sensitivity to space and ineluctable attention to detail, lovingly reflected in each brush and flick of a piano key, however, upholds the old adage that "nothing is more fragile than subtlety".

### ENDIKU

#### HASSELT

TURTLES DREAM 10001 CD

BY DAVID WADDELL

Following on from last year's *L'Exigence De L'Existence*, with Ryo Fukuda (see The Nine 225), *Hasselet* is the second outing on Turtles Dream for Chie Matsu, featured once more on her customary two string violin or *shojo* (you're Chinese), percussion and voice.

Partnered this time by guitarist Seiichi Yamamoto (Bozuka, Koso Toso, *Most*) and French underground musician par excellence Eric Conder on hurdygurdy and electronics, it documents the entirety of a concert in Hasselt, Belgium, on 1 November 2002. Parallel to the stripped to the bone post-psycho school documented by his sister imprint A Brut Secret, producer Michel Horwitz has been quick to identify another current in Japanese improvised music, a line stretching back to the psychadelic days of the *Ta Matuk Travellers* and beyond. In his sleeve notes Nick Cohn describes this music as "long-form noise-dream psych-folk improvisation", which pretty well sums up what's on offer while handily doing justice to the music's naturally unfolding sense of atmosphere and drama.

After patiently establishing a G drone, Matsu's vocals begin tentatively after about 16 minutes, Conder's hurdygurdy is less assertive and sternal than on his previous efforts on disc in *The Last Phenomenon*, with Jean-Luc Guionnet and Pascal Berthet (Dysparein on *Corpus Hennemus*), and Seiichi with Guionnet and percussionist Eric Brubelle (Zmav on *Shembale*). Like Fukuda's cello on *L'Exigence De L'Existence*, it serves in the first part of the work to anchor the music harmoniously, though its rougher timbre adds a certain edge and urgency to the drone.

As the intensity level steadily rises, Conder passes the drone over to Yamamoto, until the music eventually kicks off after 26 and a half minutes into a dark forest of strange electronic bimbois, with Yamamoto's fate modelling the inspired recorder twittiness of Arthur Doyle. An underlying pulse begins to establish itself when

Matsu moves to the drum kit at the half-hour mark, accompanying her cavernous tone and diatomic cymbals splashed with holy modal wailing while, back on guitar, Yamamoto's delicate arpeggiates give the pentatonic scale a workout of which Jerry Garcia would have been proud. By the 37 minute mark things are getting out of hand, and Conder's electronics come into their own, at last catapulting proceedings into chaos. Yamamoto and Matsu salvage a crane but the music retreats to the forest once more.

A strange, coded coda ensues, with Yamamoto's vocal growls punctuated by Conder's feisty cello. Can might be right to describe the ending as imperfect and unfinished, but it's alarmingly effective, if slightly marred by a brief and unnecessary double-dribble of audience applause that somewhat breaks the spell.

### EXCEPTER

KA

PULSETRON FUSE335 LP

Excepter are a Brooklyn-based quintet helmed by John Feli Ryan, formerly of the many-titled No Neck Blues Band. While the group shares some of the same meditative, sun-dawning qualities found in NCKB, *Excepter* are distinctive for having been around such a short time. KA is their first release, recorded a year ago. The group fuse a wide range of sputtering electronics — crossing paths with both dreamy drones like Ferriss and fuzz blasters like Shabu — to otherwise wavy vocalists and looping tribal beats, creating a dark, busy noise-cloud that's often like a Krautrock jam broadcast through a sound-modified AM radio.

KA begins with two hypnotic tracks of cacophorous meaning, like a lab experiment on the ineluctability of the human voice that becomes a horror film for the blind. The final piece on the first side, "Be Beyond Me", hints at coming mayhem, raising the mewling vocals into a symphony of shibboleths before shedding down to a skeletal click. Side two is more continuous, a series of deep loops pulled up with ping-ponging Casio beats and bursts of abrasive noise. "Give Me The Coal" piles up pop, sputter and other sonic accidents like a machine learning to operate itself. "Halloway" plunges random snorts and shuffles into waves of drone and like vocal bubbling. The rest is just as blissfully infinite, as the group fill each second with a regenerating noise that seems to eat and regenerate itself endlessly.

### ELIZABETH ANKA VAJAGIC

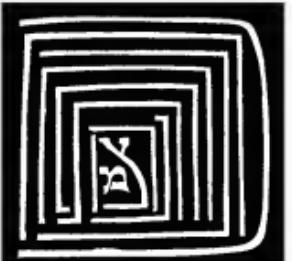
STAND WITH THE STILLNESS OF THIS DAY

### BLACK OX ORKESTAR

VER TANZ?

### THEE SILVER MOUNTAIN REVERIES

THE "PRETTY LITTLE LIGHTNING PAW" E.P.



CHIRICAHUA



Since KA is so seriously exhaustive, it's hard to guess where Excepter might go from here. The long files of live recordings recently posted on their Website, which sound like murky waters thrown in an abandoned prison, are certainly promising. Regardless, KA is in near perfect stretch of sound generation that will be tough for this unit to top.

#### FRED FRITH

#### EYE TO EAR II

BY NICK SOUTHGATE

Following on *Eye to Ear*, this is a second miscellany of Fred Frith's work designed as accompaniments. The nine pieces are drawn from four separate projects. However, the inventive interpolation of one of the project's four parts between the other track creates a pleasing sense of a coherent album and not just a collection of fragments for completeness. The project providing these interludes is "Sisidion", originally the soundtrack to a collection of arrebatas by Kristin Vesna, themselves designed to accompany a dance piece, *For Whom Am I*, choreographed by Peggy Phelan, each a quirky sound collage of speech and abstract sound jets.

"Germing, Gods, And LSD" is a previously unreleased part of a far longer series of sessions with Peter Böckler and director Peter Mettler, a collaboration from which the original soundtrack recordings were drawn. Moody plaudians and spare piano chords segue in and out of faster-paced sections of strumming straight rock guitar, vomiting from Frith, set against furious and jittery drum samples before winding down with a sublime psych-style "backwards" guitar solo.

On "Irreische Mit Goethen Huren", a searing Irrenwank is maintained throughout, punctuated by howling accordion chords and kalimba, both from the versatile Frith. A similar palette is used on the suite of tracks from *Reverning Home*, a documentary directed by Andy Aronhams Wilson about choreographer Anna Halprin and artist Edo Stabellino. Here, however, Frith is joined by a group including Heather Insler on accordion, Fan Wu on *gu zheng* (a plucked, zither-like instrument) and Anne Hegi on words with Frith himself, contributing the intriguing "Möbius Instruments".

The most rewarding piece here is "Gambling...", maybe because its conception makes it more self-contained. However, even out of context all the pieces fascinate enough to make this album far more than a collection of curios.

#### LUTZ GLANDIEN

#### LOST IN ROOMS

BY DAVID STRUBBES

*Lost in Rooms* is a conflation of two projects. The first sees Berlin avant-garde composer Lutz Glandien, an occasional collaborator with Chico Cutler, investigating the "trial character of speech" by taking individual words and syllables from readytext made by an International dance ensemble in The Texts and Tongues of their choice. He isolated these fragments from their original semantic context and reassembled and juxtaposed them alongside a variety of samples, concrete/instrumental sounds and recordings. However, *Lost in Rooms* is also in part a "vortexicist" narrative, based on a series of vivid childhood recollections recited by

Canadian dance Deafik. The common link between these two undertakings is obscure. It's hard to see how they speak or relate to one another. This lack of integration, though puzzling, is not necessarily problematic, for it is.

The narrative aspect of *Lost in Rooms* seems unusually taut — simple childhood reminiscences, then the dawning realisation that the place you grew up in feels palpably alien when you return to it years later; however, Glandien's violence counters the wistful air of these musings with field recorded samples, which are cinematically shocking, like the troubling memory montages in *Pi* or Jacobs' *Ladder*; "The Last Room", meanwhile, depicts the sense of a room coming alive in a chorus of creaks and drapes which eventually overwhelm its hapless occupant.

Meanwhile, the parallel forays into phonetic-as-music incarnate their point with dark effectiveness, especially on "Lieke This", with its dismembered fragments of voice fluttering out of the Dark Ambient assemblage. The sense of decontextualisation is not merely academic but quite unnerving. This album is further punctuated by instances of turbulent, fast-out Techno, which catch the listener out in the open like an electric cloudburst. Although *Lost in Rooms* may be quite disparate, its overall loosing, blathering effect is quite singular.

#### GILLES GOBEIL &

#### RENE LUSSIER

#### LE CONTRAT

EMPREINTES DIGITALES IMPD0472 CD

BY BRIAN MARLEY

When Gilles Gobeil and René Lussier accepted a 1991 Canada Council for the Arts Commission to work together on an electroacoustic composition, little did they know that they were letting themselves in for *Bilbiley*, they decided to base their work on Goethe's *Faust*, to create sonic events that would correspond to each of the poem's key episodes. Seven years later, after public performances in 1999 and 2000 of unfinished versions of the piece, Gobeil and Lussier completed their work to CD.

This isn't so much a final version as one that has been abandoned. Between 1995 and 2003, episodes were rearranged, and the narrative aspect of Goethe's work were set aside. There has been no attempt to create music that represents or embodies the psychological traits and moral conflicts upon which Goethe's tale hangs.

Almost nothing about this recording satisfies *Le Contrat* (The Contract or Pact) may relate to *Faust*, but only in the most oblique manner. When set to shuffle play, the CD player offers a series of episodes which hang together no less (and, needless to say, no more) authentically than the version that Gobeil and Lussier present as standard play. The motifs of bells, car cries, etc. indicate continuity and suggest coherence, but this is spurious. Perhaps the most galling aspect of the whole enterprise is an extensive eleventh, listing the grieves, commendations and the like that Gobeil and Lussier have been awarded in international competitions. Only their fellow electroacoustic musicians could care a damn about such things. Listeners outside those hallowed circles expect interesting music, and nothing of the sort is on offer here.

#### GÜNTER/HALLIWELL/

#### WASTELL

#### +MINUS [FIRST MEETING]

TITRES: CD/CDR 10041 CD

BY BRIAN MARLEY

Surprisingly little has been said about the influence that laptop composers have had on the new generation of free improvisors. When Steve Roden coined the term "lower case sound" to describe his own music, he was amazed by how swiftly the term was taken up, and how widely (and sometimes speculatively) it was used. In the critical lexicon, lower case sound is now used to distinguish quietist composers such as Reuben, Bernhard Günter and Richard Charter from the brawler producers of the Meg crowd, or the insectoid musicks that Raster-Noton specialises in. But each of these approaches to laptop composition has its merits, and all have had a profound impact on the way that free improvisation sounds.

Bernhard Günter's music seems more consistently lower case than anyone else's. He knows how to use the aural learning of digital audio to best advantage, and his work shows an understanding of scale and form that's second only to Morton Feldman. Günter, an avowed Feldmanite, is to my knowledge the only composer who has taken Feldman's sensibility (other than his musical ideas, of which Feldman notoriously said he had none) into an entirely new realm: that of electronic sound. But with the one exception of *Crossing The River*, Günter's compositions aren't particularly Feldman-like: He's very much his own man.

What's intriguing about +minus is that, for the first time, Günter is presenting himself as an improviser, and he's doing so in the company of improvisers of note: the British musicians Graham Halliwell (alto saxophone and feedback) and Mark Wastell (amplified textures, Neapease bowls, gang) in summer 2003, at the Etz Festival in the Basque Country. As they talked, it began to dawn on them that their musical concerns were remarkably similar. In November they got together in Norfolk to record +minus. On the "minus" tracks, the music is entirely improvised. The "plus" tracks are also improvised, but one of Günter's compositions provides a foundation for each. The musicians play with and against each one, and the interface between the composed and improvised elements is seamless.

Günter's instrument on this CD is a solid-based five-stringed contraption called the electro celotar, which is played like, and at times sounds not unlike, an Indian sarangi. When bowed, the celotar produces deep, earthy tones, whose graininess fits well with Wastell's rather less organic-sounding amplified textures. Gilding through the many spaces and brief silences is Halliwell's saxophone. Unlike the penetrative sinewave wails of Sacha M's empty sampler, the timbre of Halliwell's feedback saxophone is delicate. It uses more speculative. At times, such as on "minus two", this sounds like Ambient as it should have been, an altogether more adventurous music, shaped of claying serenity, icy repititiveness and lyre tunes.

None of these three players has made a music quite like this before, so unselfconsciously expressive and melodic, +minus is a thing of rare beauty.

## HAFLER TRIO

### KILL THE KING

KORN PLASTICS KPTK CO

BY JIM HAYNES

It is a dangerous proposition to take sound, image, word or anything from The Hafler Trio at face value, since their history is dotted with deliberate misinformation, sleights of hand and generic trickery. A particularly overt example is on their debut *String! An Open Letter*, on which they perpetuated a myth about two acoustic engineers, Robert Sprague and Dr Edward Molesbeck, who had supposedly passed on a wealth of psychoacoustic research to The Hafler Trio to continue. This turns out to be fiction, but the tall tale was a good one, especially with the album's masterful cut "Paste collage" as an accompaniment.

By the late 80s, the original partnership between Andrew McKenna and Chris Watson came to an end with McKenna continuing to hold the reins of the trio. McKenna's strategies and philosophies have become more and more complex over the years. On occasion, he appears to reveal those strategies in a supposed act of benevolence towards as poor mortals who foolishly seek to find a meaning, an experience, something within *its* work.

13 years after its initial release, which was named with digital bit rot, *Kill The King* remains a brilliant if baffling production. It opens with a two minute reading from an unknown woman with a Germanic accent. She speaks in a deliberate monotone about the quality of her voice. No when she utters the statement "It will not be raised or lowered, no matter what happens", inflections carry her voice up and down and undermine the aplomb of that statement. Coupled with McKenna's glib treatment of the voice, this brief introduction does as a template for the remainder of the album in which obvious semantical guides are no longer wild, yet an acute intellect is still at work.

In this context, *Kill The King* reads as a unique and incredibly personal form of communication through the physicality of sound, which holds its own peculiar set of mosaics and neologisms. During the ensuing 70 minutes, McKenna, in occasional collaboration with John Duncan and Zbigniew Karkowski, reconstructualists a huge wealth of synthetic and sound sounds to form the basis of this audio language. Here, data-crunched drones are suspended within an enciphered ether, the nervous snap of a modern nestle against correlated pulsations, and degenerated whispers reverberate through an aural ambience. These passages do not impart any specificity – instead, they are selections from a sensory taxonomy of moods and emotions, in particular awe, horror, tension and fear. *Kill The King* succeeds in pulling together all of these grandiose ideas and ridiculous concepts by the sheer force of their conviction that sound has a profound ability to affect the human body and spirit.

## KEIJI HAINO

### HIKARI YAMI UCHITOKEAISHI

KONO HIBIKI

PSF PSF08017 CO

BY DEWEY WALKER

Approaching Keiji Haino's oeuvre is like going in inspiration at expansive bookshelves full of arcane literature. His sprawling discography is abundant with babbling mystic metaphysics,

psychedelic, fragmentary themes and innumerable chaotic improvisations. Haino's white hot rock, free jazz and truthticker muse evoke other times and places, even forms of consciousness.

However, *Hikari Yami Uchitokeaishi* (Kone Hibiki), which consists of three lengthy solo acoustic improvisations, sees Haino express his muse in relatively user friendly form. It is a stark recording unmediated by the FX alchemy of other works. He's pictured on the cover cradling a six string classical guitar, as if preparing to strum out a few campfire favourites. Yet even Haino unplugged remains as enigmatic as on his overdriven, overwhelming works, with these improvisations holding up unanchored territory without even the anchoring presence of percussion or a drums. Silence intruders become as important as the notes themselves, with Haino alternating between precise classical fingerings and flamenco flourishes, occasionally caressing a single chord repeatedly. After an hour of neck bend and string buzz, a steady cascade of plucked harmonics leads into his fiddling into a maddening coda.

These obscure meditations reveal much about the artist – a desire for simplicity, perhaps, as attempt to express beauty in minimal styles. Moments of naked prettiness also hint at a benign generosity of spirit, which many Haino archivists have already sensed even in his noisiest moments. With a few more idiosyncratic projects such as this, it might yet be possible to attain a clearer picture of Haino the man.

## TOM HAMILTON

### LONDON FIX

MUSIC-EK 116 CD

BY JULIAN COWLEY

Since 1980 Tom Hamilton has been a major player in the realization of Robert Ashley's operas, acting as engineer, mixer and contributor of electronic orchestration. He has also worked recently with singer Tom Buckner as a duet, heard on *Jump The Circle, Jump The Line* (Mutabell), and in the quartet *Act Of Finding*. Hamilton's Off-Hour West State (300 Dales 1986) took the New York subway system as a basic source of musical design, with Buckner, trombone, Peter Zurnino and sea shanty. Roscoe Mitchell making the journey through a volatile electronic milieu.

*London Fix* is a hour-long continuous electronic music environment that comes with instructions to play softly. Preempting it, Hamilton performed a kind of higher interim, re-envisaging gold into sound. More specifically, he used the contours of gold market price charts as a kind of graphic score, triggering his own electronic pitchfraking system. Composer and installation artist Michael J Schenck supplied computer programming that enabled Hamilton to permute and modify the stock fluctuations, generating a rich counterpoint out of the stark analytic data.

It was the method of market analysis, he says, rather than its madness, that drew him to make music that changes with the price of gold. But London Fix is no glacial concept piece. Its glistering textures are indolent of Terry Riley's *A Rainbow in Curved Air* phase, sonorities like busily cross-crossing over soft tones. Hamilton is, after all, a connoisseur of the pleasures of vintage analogue sound synthesis. So index

points are provided to aid navigation, any can become a starting point for the colourful and seductive webs of London Fix.

## KIT SPATULA

### MEAST

PLANET MU 20090520CD

BY CHRIS SHARP

astonishingly, it's almost a decade since Mike Paradasian followed the success of his first two *Up* albums, *Up! Up!* and *Up! Up!*, by unleashing his Kit Spatula alter ego. 1985's *Spatula* Freak appeared on the Californian Reflective imprint but Paradasian made fuller use of the follow-up *Full Sunken Breaks*, which he released in 2000 on his own Planet Mu. *Kit Spatula* records tend to be lengthy, and *Meast* is a double CD, offering 150 minutes of music. Doubtless there are people out there who relish at the prospect of such a treat but such an epic playing time tends to reveal weaknesses rather than strengths to the unconverted listener, and all things considered there are few genuine, enduring surprises here.

Things start intriguing enough with the jaunty, sprightly disco of "Housewife" – complete, naturally enough, with obligatory dodgy contact line sample – and the "Shister's Bassline" reveals Kit Spatula's undiminished knack for a plonkyname melody. And there are occasional moments when the emotional range expands, as on the uneasy, vaguely Middle Eastern "Carter" and the maddeningly atmospheric "Maccas". As the record progresses, however, it's hard to escape two suspicions – firstly, that Paradasian hasn't modified his mood upwards since *Spatula* Freak and secondly, that *Meast* is a bit of a "panto-bin" special, which gathers together effluvia and doodles from the dusty corners of his hard drive, throwing them together without the benefit of any overarching theme. In truth, such a relentlessly aimless procession of day-glo, artless, analogue squelches and 80s synthyng echoes only suggests that sometimes, composition can make just a little too little, or that Effervescent music is one thing but not making an effort is something else entirely.

## THE KNIFE

### THE KNIFE

EMI 10191 CD

BY LOUISE GRAY

Scandinavia is known for its unusual musical strengths but Sweden's Karin and Olaf Dreijer could represent one of the strongest yet. Creating *The Knife* in 1999, while also forming Rave Records as a vehicle for their own releases (though not exclusively so), the West Coast sibling band of electroacoustic balladry will certainly draw comparisons to Björk and Kate Bush, simply because Karin Dreijer's vocal swoop between cadences can be extreme.

However, *The Knife*, the debut album now receiving its UK release two years after it conquered the Swedish alternative scene, is stranger than the sum of such associations. Certainly, it offers an unusual soundworld. The Dreijers favour the most aseptic synth technology, which, when combined with acoustic guitars and accordions, produces a soundtrack that's simultaneously familiar and slightly off-kilter. It's a tactic born of deliberation. However dark *The Knife* is (and it gets very dark – the longest

SONGS  
ABSOLUTE ZERO  
AFTER DINNER  
ALBUMMALEDESSA  
ANN  
PAOLO ANGELO  
ARCANE DEVICE  
ART BEARS  
BETA  
BLAST  
PETER BLEGVAD  
CASSIUS  
CINCH  
LINDSEY COOPER  
PETER CUSACK  
CHRIS CUTLER  
JEAN DEOROME  
TOM DUMUZI  
TOD DUCKSTADER  
SOB DRAKE  
IANCU BUMETRESCU  
EC NUDES  
FAI  
FAUST  
JANET FEDER  
FRED FRITH  
LUTZ FRIDIN  
GROUND ZERO  
HACO  
HAIL  
HENRY COH  
TIM HODGKINSON  
ROBERT IOLINI  
KALAHARI SURFERS  
KAMPEC DOLORES  
ERIK KIRBALY  
BORIS KOVACS  
REINE LUSSIER  
STREL-WATER-LIGHT  
STEVE MACLEAN  
CHRISTIAN MARCILAY  
ISTVAN MARTHA  
MINIMONIST ORCHESTRA  
MUSCI-VENOTIA  
DAVID LEE MYERS  
THE NICKS  
NEWS FROM RABIR  
N.O.R.M.A.  
OSSETURA  
JOHN OSWALD  
P.S.  
ZEEENA PARKINS  
QUATRE GUITARISTS  
LESENOON ROMPOLOKON  
JON ROSE  
THE SCIENCE GROUP  
SLAPP HAPPY  
SUN RA  
THINKING PLAGUE  
STEPHAN TICHMAYER  
JACK YEEES  
MICHAEL YOGI  
VIRIL  
LAUREN WINGER  
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track, "Rwanda"), takes a trip with Santa into the Red Shoes territory), the Dreyfus are, above all, playful. They use the gender confusion that technology can afford to the hilt – voices are transposed between genders, tension is entrenched by the simple expedient of studio modulation, lyrics describe the transmigration of low objects. One has to witness their extraordinary video for "Put the Dot", a track from their forthcoming Deep Cuts album and downloadable from Risteb's Website to see just how far the Dreyfus can go. It's one of the most interesting short films this side of Holligan's Tilmanas.

Still, the charm of this album extends beyond its sinusoid dislocations. Songs like "N.Y. Hotel" and "High School Poem" have already been picked up for the soundtrack for Christos Glezos's feature film, *Hannah Arendt*. It's debatable where the Kritis will be placed in the wider scheme of things. They could be claimed by art or club scenes. Whichever happens, it's to be hoped that that this will allow enough space to do justice to the Dreyfus' perverse ingenuity.

### THE REVEREND LESTER KNOX OF TIFTON, GEORGIA PUT YOUR FACE IN GWOD: THE 366TH REVIVAL

THE SMACK SHIRE TSSR1002 CD

BY OLIVE BELL

"Amen! There'll be angels appearing in this broadcast! I can feel waves of the Holy Ghost! Ayy-men!" Veering wildly between the hilarious and the nightmarish, this is a collection of the less hagiaged moments of US radio preacher Lester Knox. Kaoru Hobiki of Frank Chickens has pointed out the common ground between religious leaders and stage performers (Hobiki's mother was a priestess/standup comedian in Tokyo) and Knox knows how to work the crowd out there in what he calls "outlandish" Mayence rocker Tom Smith (to Live and Shave in UK) has lovingly compiled this CD from 20 years of taping Knox's broadcasts in Georgia. Whatever else Knox was doing, he was creating a space for uninhibited behaviour by poor whites and fixed nothing better than a room full of shouting, moaning and singing, led by his own gauging, audibly swoonsoaked exercices. On one grim track we hear him sobbing with frustration because someone has repeatedly interrupted him, opening doors and snatching off lyrics.

However a steen of determined fans accompanied him into the studio, where they poured out frighteningly ardent songs of praise. Never mind if the guitarist has only one chord and it's in the wrong key, these extraordinary performances are topped by brother Hayward, an elderly man getting right up on the mic for "Just A Closer Walk With Thee", and segueing into an impassioned incoherent chant about how he is heading back to the Reverence.

Too extreme and primitive for many in Georgia, despite 50 years of broadcasting, Knox failed to receive an obituary in his local newspaper when he passed away in 1996. Knox's salsa-flecked combination of wild and passion and raw musicality is exactly what's lacking in today's Anglican church. His contribution to the debate about gay priests will be sorely missed.

### THE KATIA LABEQUE BAND UNSPOKEN

UNPRESKABLE UNP0001 CD

BY BRIAN MORISON

Miles Davis and Robert Irving III dedicated "Kris" to this French pianist, still best known as playing partner of her sister Maija Labeque and life partner of guitarist John McLaughlin. Apart from the now requisite Radhaorchestra cover, "Ear Music" (or A. Flein), it's the only non-original on the surprisingly tenuously grep and label debut. The arrangements are by electronics man Dave Manc, co-founder of Unpreskable and set to make his own debut as a composer on the label later in the year. Marisa Gilmore plays "acousto-letric" drums.

The effect is in places not dissimilar to that of Craig Taborn's mix of acoustic piano with laptop sound and other instrumental effects, *Junk Mags* (reviewed elsewhere this issue). The fundamental difference is that Taborn's thinking is lateral and four-dimensional (messing with musical-historical time as well as metre and pulse), Unpreskable is relentlessly linear, transfix loops embedded and sometimes shrouded with effects. "Sleuth" is a conventional piano étude that has been wreathed in electronic mist. Take away the vapour and what is left? The same structure applies to "Invention (Beta)", though here at least the piano is foregrounded and the longer duration opens up promising pressure cracks in its open form.

"Hyper" makes full use of the group's means, and introduced vocal samples of Paulette Goddard but it's the introduction of special guest Paon Dass Baul's song on "Invocation" that lifts it into a new dimension. He and Manu Sén also add shanohi and ektaa to the mix and the following "Runtime", giving them a spacious Mediterranean feel. "Kata" and the Radhaorchestra theme are tackled on the end, not quite as afterthoughts but so as not to interrupt the auteur's flow, which is to be fair to it works better as a unity than it does in the parts. The group's next project is a collaboration with a symphony orchestra, familiar enough territory for Labeque but a sweetlytoned company for an outfit that suffers from too much sound, not too little.

### THE LOOP ORCHESTRA NOT OVERTLY ORCHESTRAL

OUTCULTURE OUTCULTURELLES CD

BY KEN HOLLINGS

There's something slightly retrograde about the humble tape loop. An unstructured acoustic band of variable and indeterminate length, it has helped transform experimental music into a cottage industry over the past 60 years, allowing people to mess around with the standard arrangement of cappella, unison and record heads found on conventional tape recorders in the comfort of their own home. Record, play back then play back again and aaseum was an effectively simple formula that could be repeated endlessly – is the electronic equivalent of the comb and paper. As Uncle Bill Burroughs once pointed out, anyone can play

Having its origins in a fabulously misguided attempt to create a full orchestra effect out of an ensemble of individual tape recorders playing back the sounds made by conventional instruments, Australia's Loop Orchestra is steadfastly analogue and despite the ebbs and flows of the spontaneous event. Formed in

the early 1990s, its career has been consistently wayward, crisscrossing between composed compositions out of thickly layered effects. Questions of duration are an important factor in the use and deployment of tape loops, and it's interesting to note how much of the Loop Orchestra's latest release references radio, a medium not traditionally sympathetic to such protracted issues. The magnificent musical skins that constitute "Radionomy" are a tribute to the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, whose use of tapes in the composition of jingles and signature tunes was subsumed by brevity, concision and the pursuit of precise pitch. Similarly, "Profiles" was first commissioned to accompany readings by Anthony Worrall on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's excellent late-night radio show *Night Air*. From doctored tape loops to doctoring the airwaves, there's a strong sense here of new tenses being played on an old instrument.

### CHRIS MCGREGOR'S BROTHERHOOD OF BREATH BREMEN TO BRIDGWATER CUNIFORM CUN0001/02/03/04 CD

BY BARRY WITHERDEN

The Bremen tracks here were cut in late 1971. Those from Bridgewater date from QMN tours by the reformed Brotherhood in February and November 1975, by which time McGregor and his family were enjoying a new life in rural France.

While McGregor settled in Aquitaine, I huddled in my room in Camden Town playing the Brotherhood's debut album, already much the worse for wear (as, indeed, was the LP) when my favourite came in during Dudu Pukwana's "Yes" and added it was watching Come Dancing.

Actually she had a point: some of McGregor's need vokals did suggest Joe Loss rather than Ellington – you can hear what she meant during "King's Theme" on disc one – but it's an insignificant aspect of his school. The Brotherhood's voice of song took in distorted echoes of military bands and hymns, the traditions of the Xhosa people and the merveilleous music that emerged from South African Townships in the 50s. These tracks crash in and fall back only to be sucked into the next snarled heaving mass, one tune often transitioning into the next with no clear boundary.

The Brotherhood were a real group of graps. Among their alums were two thirds of McGregor's small group of the 60s, the frontline of the Kudu Tupper Sedent, the entire Mike Delorme trio, plus various Westbrook associates and inverards like Eva Parker, Kevin Bailey and Bruce Giant. If for no other reason, I'd recommend this album because it augments the sparse catalogue of available Delorme recordings. It's good to hear him again, so long as riding the ensemble, a Salmer surfer on the Brotherhood's rolling swell of sound.

On Pukwana's "Kwali", we're treated to a rare example of his clannish playing. He's up against fierce competition, of course. Pukwana, his lines endlessly inventive, his blistering tone stripping the veneer off everything it comes into contact with, is on great form even by his established standards. Splendid, too, are Harry Miller, Gary Windo, Mongezi Faza and Malcolm Griffiths. But maybe it's unfair to single anyone out from such a galaxy of talent, all playing with such ferocity.

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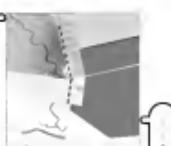


The Dreyfus

BCD (richard.h.kirk)



Outculture



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and commitment. Be warned that the sound on the Badwater tracks is poorly-balanced, but it still conveys the power, raw excitement and adventure of a Brotherhood gig.

### TOSHIMARU NAKAMURA & TETUJI AKIYAMA

MEETING AT OFF SITE VOL 3  
IMPROVISED MUSIC FROM JAPAN 1985-95 CD

### PAUL HOOD

#### CPLASTICS

TWO-THOUSAND-21-16 CD R

BY CLIVE HILL

This year, Toshimaru Nakamura and Tetuji Akiyama are ringing down the curtain on their *Meeting At Off Site* series. Over four years their simple concept – invite an improviser or two to share an encounter in the small Tokyo gallery – has generated 40 concerts involving nearly 60 musicians, and three CDs, of which this is the final instalment. The aesthetics in Off Site have a crap, naked quality, encouraging the intimate, sometimes microscopic excursions into close listening that have become associated with the series; you can hear a pin drop, and maybe the angels dancing on its head too.

Norwegian jazzor Håkon Kornstad might seem an unlikely choice for this party, but his track makes for a strong opening. Kornstad's tenor sax grapples with Akiyama's guitar like a river rolls pebbles. Meanwhile Nakamura's no-input mixing board creates a sputtering zing, as if he were pumping oxygen into the room rather than doing anything musical. The piece is structured by each musician stopping regularly – as a musical device it's a no-brainer, but crucial to the way this landscape arranges.

On the longest track, Seishiro M (sampled) and outlast (aka Keiko Ueda) on Powerbook) engage with Akiyama's prepared guitar. The mixture of electronic and acoustic sound is as tightly wound as a mesh of *gagaku* orchestra, and builds inexpressibly until it evokes the swell of tides under a boat. Other tracks feature Masafumi Ebara (trumpet), Keishi Sugimoto (from excellent Ambient Improv quartet Minamori), Gérard Miller, Omi Arashima and the UK's Paul Head. In every case these are musical encounters that marry disciplined understanding to an intense sense of purpose, mysterious soliles that reward repeated listening.

The Japanese connection is important; for Paul Hood, whose first major solo release, *Classics*, has just appeared, His Onlykids radio show on Resonance FM is devoted to every hue of Japanese music, and his Instant Music Meeting club has introduced many Japanese musicians to London audiences. And who can forget the exhibition of vinyl singles sleeves found in Tokyo fleamarkets?

Reying on his trusty vintage GPS record deck, some amplified brio-bass and a mixing desk, Hood crafts a satisfying mix of live and studio pieces which is never less than listenable. He moves between earthy and perky, with splashes of influence from Steve Beresford and Philip Jeck. He can work up rattling machinery and feedback chords into an ambiguous texture, and the closing "Hospitality" is beautifully gritty. Mostly subtle, Hood allows himself as outburst of vinyl abuse ("Large Country Building"), and an episode of feedback meymen played live at Lewisham Arthouse. The eight tracks are nicely segued together to show off

Hood's range. Not a polished performance exactly – the GPS wouldn't stand for that – but one of considerable poise.

### OCTAVIUS

#### AUDIO NOIR

MUSH-MH223 CD

BY KATHY MOLINE

The term 'experimental HipHop' typically suggests a hazy fog of lethargic beats and languorous atmospheres, the soundtracks to some stoner B-boy's psychedelic reverie or mildly paranoid and comatose. cDUDGEGAD, for example, blunt and meister the sharp, dry edges of their music and abstract its sociopolitical bite into mirey/outer space surrealism. Octavius adapt a different strategy. In much the same way as Third Eye Foundation's Sennitox smothered its drum 'n' bass beats with a blanket of screeching guitar feedback, William Marshal and his Oakland cohorts don't so much soften the jagged topography of HipHop as hold down a pillow of heated out distortion to its face and watch it kick, thrash and finally suffocate in numb surrender.

Clearly Marshal and co are as indebted to Industrial forebears like Trent Reznor as they are to The RZA. In as much truth to My Bloody Valentine as DJ Shadow. Yet despite wearing its influences so obviously on its sleeve, *Audio Noir* is a remarkably fresh and exciting album. "Monochrome" awakes its lyrics by Badbrutal sample in a fusing cloud of chaotic reversed instrumentation and stilled vocal effects, its wall-to-wall work impressively beneath the tools' meek rural meadowlark in a way that recalls AR Kane's "Lolita", "Cellophane" and "Vicent/Penx". *Penx* sees Marshal in his peak howling, voice over shattering, knifing beakdrop of distorted beats and chilling noise furnaces. The apocalyptic density produced by the collision of Nathaniel Evans' programming and the echo-chimiced guitar of Giovanni Cruz is the unifying but compelling and there are passages of great invention and blazed beauty throughout.

While the work of Octavius is hardly rivetingly, to dismiss it as humoresque or sophomore would be grossly unfair. Marshal's fractured harangue rolls more against his own confusion and impotence than at the state of the world around him. Not *Audio Noir* feels like much more of a political document than that might suggest. In contrast to the higid expanses of Ice and Sean, or the slackscapes of the Anticon crew, there's a sense here that the very DNA of HipHop has mutated into new shapes, either then grafting onto a separate genus of 'experimental' practice.

### MIKE PATHOS

#### PEOPLE

12204 723497 CD

BY NICK SOUTHCOTE

Googling "Mike Pathos" cranks my computer. Every time and without fail, for an impossibly outsider artist like Pathos the names sear. Even his name is a weapon, a talisman on the information superhighway. It is not his intention ever to be easy.

Pathos's approach on *People* is to reinvent himself as a wherein sampler. He snags snatches of jingles and melodies from banally familiar songs against a rotcular gitchetla of found sounds and abused instruments. Pathos's

appropriation of these snippets and his audacious absurd cover versions suggest his secret is not in his different modes of performance but in a different mode of listening. The performances are so sincere in their uniqueness, so naive in their artlessness, that one can only conclude that Pathos doesn't hear these songs the way we do.

His cover of John Lennon's "Imagine", refined "Lia", provides a gemine example. It is adopted down to a 90-second assault of voice and feedback guitar, as one might imagine a Velvet Underground *Play The Ramones* album to be. Sideswiping covers like this are, of course, handy now and one could invoke Pathos of flogging a dead sacred cow. However, the 25 year old's distilled vision and the arrasage and ignorance of youth protect him. This is not a gift or knowing exercise. One cannot conceive the journey necessary to end up making music as canously hideous as this.

Pathos's solipsistic filtering may be the only legitimate response to an age supersaturated with cultural and countercultural icons and artsects. The dismal and distressing art it produces should stand, therefore, as a stark warning to all.

### IVO PERELMAN DOUBLE TRIO

#### SUITE FOR HELEN F

BOXYHOLDER 09300392 2CD

BY BRAD MORRISON

The association between free jazz and abstract art is a long and obvious one, though potentially misleading. It begins with Alberto's use of Jackson Pollock on the cover of *Free Jazz* by Ornette Coleman's Double Quartet. Brasilean saxophonist Ivo Perelman is also a painter, and this new set by his Double Trio is inspired by the work of American abstractor Helen Frankenthaler, a follower of Pollock.

For such a commanding player, seemingly all ego and ego, Perelman has shown a surprising interest in calmer forms. His *Loco CD Seven Energies Of The Universe* (2001) explored maleness and femaleness along with passion, frustion, endlessness, conversion, living and life, all concepts central to the Torah. Its successor *The Metropolis* brought a further downshift, largely because unassumingly Perelman opted to work with another horn player; in this case Louis Sclavis. With Suite for Helen F. he has returned to a fiery form, howling and squealing through seven long improvisations that are linked – whether before or after the fact, isn't clear – to the seven paintings illustrated in this liner book. The important point is that these are Perelman works, not Frankenthaler's. Whether that's ego or a copyright dispute also isn't clear, except that the same thin paint and seared colours, the same hints of weather formations and biological forms inform both artists' work.

Quite how the music acts as a corrective to individual images I can't say, except that it seems best to concentrate on the interaction of this powerful group. The key elements are the two bassists, Dominic Duval and Mark Dresser, who provide a rich, thickening foundation for Perelman's extraordinary flights, much as Paul Rogers did on *The Metropolis*. No information as to who plays through which channel, but I'd guess that the complex bowed harmonics coming through on part two are Dresser's work. Percussionist Jay Rosen is a longline Persian

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associate, but Gerry Hertingway is the perfect addition to the line-up, a drummer who is as comfortable in a free setting as he is with rigidly constructed structures.

At not shy of two hours, spread over two CDs this is an overwhelming experience. Penhollow is fond of the palette knife and three-inch brush than he is of the 00 sable, and it's the lack of finer detail, that change of thickness and intensity in the line that makes Frankenkraut such a remarkable artist, that one misses. When, as at the start of part three, Penhollow's tenor plays a mournful melody over lowing basses, almost a Hellenic blues, it sounds as if he is preparing to explore quieted territory. A minute or two in, though, and the ghosts of Albert Ayler and the pre-disco Pharaoh Sanders are invoked. The mood is now commodity: the group stays with him. Profane as he is, it's bound to happen sooner or later, but I reckon someone should lock Penhollow in a studio with pianist Borsig Bergman and come back later to see who survived.

### THE PRIMETIME SUBLIME COMMUNITY ORCHESTRA

A LIFE IN A DAY OF A MICROORGANISM  
CORPORATE FILM COMPASS CO

BY KEITH MOLINE

Paul Minott's absurdist musical collective tamed a few hounds, and a few stomachs, with the switchblade innuendo of their last album ( ), which certainly shamed some of the flagrantly perverse of the namesake release by the glacial lowlanders Sigur Rós. Matching real musicians with sampled material, it threw together the canonic intensity of John Zorn and the playful weirdness of Frank Zappa in a colourful clash of styles and sounds.

The first part of this new release continues in a similar vein without quite losing its easy heights: "Fashion Flag For A Part-Time Patriot" and "Blesto Mambo" are furiously inventive, their expertly sequenced orchestral samples suggesting Shostakovich one moment and Mantovano the next. Minott's judicious deployment of TV ad cut-ups adds to the general air of kitsch gaudiness.

The bulk of the album is given over to the title track, a kind of soundtrack to a 1950s school radio film documenting human rather than animal life. The monologue running through it becomes increasingly surreal as the day at the life of the micro-organism in question (a subatomic family) proceeds, from an unhealthily obsession with eggs, to dealings with smallville Marfa, to a final meeting with God, bearing eggs. The musical illustration of this shaggy dog story created primarily and rather disappointingly with synthetic instruments captures the off, jolty psychosis of early educational film soundtracks almost too perfectly; to the point where it ceases to function as music at all but simply becomes another component of the satire. Zappa himself can into similar problems with "The Adventures Of Gregory Pecary" on Studio Zart; the more appropriate the music to the narrative, the less engaging it can become.

**RAMMELLZEE**  
BI-CONICALS OF THE  
RAMM-ELL-ZEE  
GOMMA 044 CD  
BY ROB YOUNG

Until Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in the mid-15th century, writing was as

indelible as speech. In copying out Biblical and other texts in handwritten script, maniacal scribes would routinely embellish the worst itself, and developed flourishes that eventually began to detract from the message. In the beginning was the letter, not the Word. Metta! typesetting, with its standardised fonts, reconfigured the distribution of knowledge according to factory settings. 600 years later, the Renaissance, the mad monk of Hip-Hop, transports that period as "the true end of our Gothic period", one marked by the subversion of the letter. The letter-bombing war on the New York transport system in the 70s and 80s by graffiti artists continued the genetic modification of the letter that, as early as 1981's "Beat Box", Ramm was calling "Ronkola Ronzonem".

Bi-Connicals Of The Renaissance is one of the most remarkable Hip-Hop documents produced at any time in the culture's three part decades. Ramm geekpicks a cosmology every bit as voluminous as the offworld phantasies of Sun Ra, as animated as the P-Funk canals, as mythologically saturated as the Wu-Tang. A kind of maniacal Von Dernier, Ramm assumes densely latticed fictional voices – sounding like a Rangan, proclaiming on the human condition from a god's eye view. Twisted death squads provide the best torment these voices inhabit: old comrade Star Argobright and Death Comet Cee, Mark Toledo & Femi Wined, on 11 tracks, amounting out of combat duty across the globe.

Bi-Connicals are a type of jar excavated from ancient burial sites. Acting as a canopic vessel, Ramm's body itself, encased in his garage outfit, suffused from the sheets of New York, preserves tales of the city's entropy 23 years ago. He and K-Rob catalogued the hardships of the homeless on "Beat Box". In 2004, Reb is method back for "Teen Pop Part 2", and former colleague Shockell also rolls up on "Pay the Rent". K-Rob, Shockell and Ramm – refugees from a battle that's simply not being fought in the theater of Hip-Hop any more – inhabit a night NYC, where an impaled lamb's pectoral hangs bare on the door and the kids are screaming for food. (Bi-Connicals also denotes a type of antenna, and Ramm turns his radar to the hidden transmissions of the 21st century city: Ramm's ex-clepticon, his skin baldly peeling through its prepubescent amateur acts as a gonzo-grope Blaxxie skysooper finale, the sense of human flesh peeking through shattered windows, his voice filtered through extreme wooden settings, his self reflected through a variety of seasons.)

With Outkast's *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* in 2000, he shares a predilection for antique English that is cross-fertilised with a secret history of "language" down the ages, celebrated in "Sagmo 1" as an opposed force to "Thousands of years of religious dogmatism". Those whom "The Powerthorn" has not yet enslaved still grope the dovers of "Babble". This monument of black futurism is inscribed with a reminder that Hip-Hop bashes as the sense of the dispossessed, not the baying of the super rich in their elite flame in safe claws.

**KINORO SHEL ROTHSCHILD**  
POP KA-VED  
MILKATKULM MILKATKULM01 CD  
BY CHRIS SHARP

The subversive activities of the Milkatshulm collective, a makeshift group of Israeli musicians, DJs and sound artists based in Jerusalem, offer

a welcome counterpart to the seemingly endless violence that beets what should be one of the most culturally various and fascinating cities in the world. The label's founder and prime mover is Kinoro Shel Rothschild, who must be a maddeningly inventive man. As well as recording under his own name and his *Diasper!* pseudonym, he's also one half of Hase & Hesba and, according to his biographical note, a "photographer, art designer, anarchist, vegetarian, technology freak, technophile, hard line eco, grunge, punk".

All of which is as misleading as it is potentially forbidding because Pop Ka-Ved is no self-righteous post-Class squat-dub excess. The title translates as "Heavy Pop", but that's not much of a pointer either. In fact, the record – all 75 minutes of it – is a series of stealthy, melancholy, strong out explorations, predominantly worldy but enlivened by the occasional chunk of garbled speech as evanescent words spill in curiously poignant ways from Rothschild's dictionate into the stream of sound.

Some of the pieces, like the opening, swelling "Seme" are brief, tendentious and inconclusive, tossed out into the world just to see what happens. But elsewhere, Rothschild allows himself endless stretches of time. At the heart of the album lies the 19 minute long "Tira", which sways and shivers through innumerable mutations, populated by numerous voices and propelled by a relentless percussive loop which fuses, ghostlike, in and out.

He saves the best for last: "Raz" rattles around the nest and fall of an infelicitously expressive wail, all Byrdsian climes and Looming white noise, while the closing "Not Our Day Today" blends skeletal beats with ectopicemic sources of sound to haunting effect. It's intriguing stuff, and as the whole record is free to download from the label Website ([www.milkatkulm.com](http://www.milkatkulm.com)), there's no reason not to take a listen.

### SCANNER DOUBLE FOLD

RMX RMX0064 CD

BY MARTIN LONGLEY

Robin Ristau has found the beat. This is Scanner at its most linear. The pulse steps up immediately and this mission is to rummage under the house foundations, perverting old feathered rave into a smutty, observational hard noise. Double Fold's eight sequed tracks are allegedly inspired by Nicholson Baker's book of the same name, although not knowing this would be no means alter the listener's level of perception.

This Siberian label has been supported by a grant from the country's Ministry of Culture (how unlikely would such funding be in the UK?). Rimbau has cannibalised tapes that he's made between 1988 and 2002 but their essence has mostly been warped beyond easy recognition. The expected voice matter appears only as a part of the dense build-up, the title track developing a shuddering bass presence towards its end, the captured voices and discredited environmental sounds making up an almost industrial overlay. By "Microfilm", the repetitive figures are bleeding, the bass is a brusque, squatting in the core, Reb's dead cents, like a palm pushing against the forehead. The diaphragm hum continues

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through "Brittle Fiction", determined melodic patterns gradually surfacing.

"Ignition" gets really rough, with 14 minutes of bullish churning. Halfway through, it shifts into a vestigial sensual feel, and this is where listeners have to leave their seats: it's all suspension for "Ultrafiche", the most compulsively dangerous tune I've heard in a good fortnight. "2nd Oxide" could easily inhabit Radio 1's One More Slot, a turnaround indeed for Scheinman. The beats cease on "The Site Of Thought", in favour of a splintering melody construction, ebbing in rotating fashion, spiralling prettily. On one level, this disc sounds quite new, but over so, Scheinman has crafted his first discographer-like,

## JENNY SCHEINMAN SHALAGASTER

72ADK 127998 CD  
BY ANDY HAMILTON

Violinist Jenny Scheinman's second CD for Todik features a quintet with the trumpet of Russ Johnson and the keyboards of Myra Melford, plus soprano/soprano singer Timi Dunn (sister) and Kenny Wollesen (trumpet). Scheinman has been a frequent collaborator with Bill Frisell – she refers to him as "my long-time music dad" – and some tracks lean towards his bluesy, jazz take on Americana. But the dominant feel is of purity to idiom reminiscent of Tim Hot Ho. Scheinman has worked extensively with Tim Hot's violinist/singer Carla Kihlstedt, as well as collaborating with other San Francisco Bay Area figures like John Schott and Ben Goldberg. The 11 compositions on Shalagaster are beautifully interpreted, if rather consistently melancholy. There's a lugubrious feel to "Milk Bottle", "The Lucky Horn" and "New View Of The Home". Trumpeter Russ Johnson drops out on "Naggin", a poignant lament where Melford's harmonica expresses depths of desolation. "Wiseacre" is a rare moment of ebullient at a fast lick. It struck me that the album might make a sympathetic soundtrack to some of Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon Days sagas.

## WADADA LEO SMITH KABELL YEARS: 1971-1979

72ADK 127970 4 CD/2XLP  
BY DAVID KEIRMAN

Trumpeter and multi-instrumentalist Wadada Leo Smith founded his own KABELL label at the dawn of the 70s as a repository for musical experiments that would otherwise be lost to the borders. In the space of eight years he released four privately pressed LPs that documented the state of his thought across a variety of instruments and creative scenarios: free solo improvisations that eschewed gathering, repetition in favour of subtle chaos of sound, through to group三人樂隊 that featured a more creatively holistic approach to free interaction. KABELL Years bundles all four long-gone LPs alongside a raft of unreleased material and a 28 page booklet filled with graphic scores, period photographs and tributes from contemporaries and collaborators like Leroy Jenkins, Henry Kaiser and George Lewis.

1971's Creative Music 3 remains one of Smith's most magical LPs: it's all solo playing, with Smith moving from trumpet and flugelhorn through hand drums, bells, motor plates, autoharp and spare harmonica. Each piece moves according to an internal episodic

structure that favours the subtle echoing and reconfiguring of intuited shapes as opposed to a more assertive assertion of repeating themes. The music is fuelled by an almost childlike sense of adventure: it sounds like jazz just playing, with patterns of notes brought into existence not to be scrutinised, cracked or compared, but simply to float up into the air and disappear, to catch in the lungs and fade. The percussive pieces are particularly consonant, tonal fantasies that Smith works into some eccentrically bent shapes.

Smith's project has always been about developing strategies to push way beyond the circumscribed edges of his instrument. Yet when the horn is actually in his mouth, instead of in bits on the floor, his sound is luminous, almost classically articulate. He's often compared to Miles Davis and at points you can hear the quirk that unites them. Here, however, he sounds closer to Bill Doorn, that keening, slightly fuzzy tone that reminds of empty rooms striped with autumn sunlight. Even so, whereas Doorn's playing always implies some kind of framing structure, Smith operates in his own zone, clearing space and chasing his own star regardless of the company he's keeping. On disc two, featuring the whole of New Orleans Aviary's 1974 Reflectivity (reissued as well as three bonus tracks from the same session), he comes on like a flashlight in the dark, a beacon around which pianist Anthony Davis and bassist Wes Brown flutter like moths. Davis's playing is well suited to Smith's very conception, his rolling solos and rumbunctious attack referencing blues and ragtime rhythms. He's usually enough to kick the myopic set of Taborn's playing.

Disc three is the closest the set comes to jazz as jazz, with the expanded New Orleans Aviary's 1976 recording Song Of Humanity bolstered by a live track from the year before. Here, the previous two are joined by saxophonist Oliver Lake and drummer Pharoah Sanders. Lake is on solid form but once again Davis's contribution is pivotal, tailing furious postscriptos onto Smith's phrases and incorporating slow swelling pools of organ and electric piano.

The final disc features 1979's *Antarcticvention* with the addition of some live tracks from 1976. Once again it's all solo, but the mood is more pointed than disc one and Smith spends most of the set on the brass, playing it slowly, singing songs to himself and measuring the silence, taking the distance between one note and the next.

## CRAIG TABORN

JUNK MAGIC  
THIRSTY EARTH 57144 CD  
BY BRIAN MORRISON

Most commentaries dwell on Craig Taborn's newest: his laptop Techno adieu and lack of interest in jazz pianism. They make it sound as if his keyboard roots go back no further than Matthew Shipp, custodian of Thirsty Earth's Blue Series Continuum imprint, who invited Taborn to make Light Made Lighter three years ago. This is an artist with very strict roots in the past, albeit taking his view of stride piano via Thelonious Sphere Monk and his approach to standards playing through electric piano Miles Davis or, like Kenny Drew (Sr or Jr).

Look a little further down Light Made Lighter's toolkit and you find the title "St Rangefield". Is the canonisation literal or ironic? Does Taborn

see the past as a blessing or a choking pressure? Evidence for the former grows with Junk Magic, which performs a dazzling alchemy with old forms and procedures, putting a heterodox instrumentation – piano and laptop, Aaron Stewart's tenor saxophone, Matt Moran's microtonal viola and David King's splashy percussion – to work on materials that are part of the pedigree of jazz.

Light Made Lighter was formed by two takes of "Bodies We Came Out Of". Here, the key track is "Bodies At Rest And In Motion", a related idea, similarly soaked in the blues and equally haiming/haunted. It's Monk redux, as "Mystero" is presumably intended to be "Preservation" and to a lesser extent "Steligmator" are disturbingly reminiscent of *Jazz From Hell*en Zappa (the some clankingly efficient *Symphony sound*) but delivered here in a flowing real-time lapapp performance that sounds closer to conventional pianism. "Shining Through" is a strange synthesis of time-row equanimity and a floaty ambience.

For the most part, Moran, King and Taborn wind an irremediable skein of sound, while Stewart's saxophone inflects a more conventional role, particularly on the moody side of "Bodies At Rest". "Stom" uses samples, loops and breakbeats as an infinite orchestra changes player world: see quotes from "All The Things You Are" or a Bud Powell phrase. Which is not to say that Junk Magic is in any way conservative or backward-looking, merely that its materials are deeply rooted in the past. If "newness" is the watchword at Thirsty Earth's newness that requires history with intelligence and a certain recalcitrant grace.

## DAVID THOMAS & TWO PALE BOYS

18 MONKEYS ON A DEAD  
MAN'S CHEST  
GLITTERHOUSE GIGI 00  
BY DAVID STUBBS

Since he hooked up with Pale Boys Keith Moline and Andy Diagram, there's every reason to feel hungry for Andy Thomas' music rather than wave it away with a replete groan. 18 Monkeys is their third studio album, and while it, represents a confection of sorts, it also signals an advance.

Whereas previous releases like *Minor Men* unfolded across their own ghetty toxic landscapes, 18 Monkeys at times feels closer in programme to US park or even The Fall of "Species Vs Species". That's certainly true of the opener "New Orleans Flu", with Moline kicking up a sweat and Thomas intones the phrase "live free or die" in unusually enunciated tones. Still, there's a sense of artfulness, of establishing the mood of content noir captured on the album sleeve.

Although he's been an expert for a long time now, Thomas again takes America as the foundation for his subject matter here, albeit America as reflected in his imagination. Hence tracks like "Nebraska Aloof Aloof", whose title alone indicates the west scope and sad penetration of Thomas's gaze. "Sad Eyed Louisiana" is a qualified allusion to Bob Dylan's "Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands". This isn't about contemplation of the distant, silent female as O'Connor, however. Rather, the sense of torifying space comes from contemplating and delecting the awful gulf that would open up

DEBUT ALBUM 'ROBOTICS WITH STRINGS' RELEASED 4 MAY 2004 ON JUNIOR ASPIRIN RECORDS. SEEKATEK.COM. DEDICATED TO JUNIOR ASPIRIN RECORDS: SEEKATEK THAT PRACTICES MUSIC. DEBUT EP

# SKILL STAMINA 12

"C'MON, YOUNG MARBLE GEMS, GANG OF FOUR, NEEDLETHORN WORK AND EVER THAT TALK – THEY'RE ALL IN THERE... AN ASTONISHING OPENING VOLLEY." LESTER PHEARN (LA NATURE CLAQUANT)

# Size Matters

3", 7", 10" and other misshapen formats

Brooklyn designer: **DEESENSEMAN** (Joseph Porrell)

"No real instruments were used in the creation of these songs" states the print on David And Iggy On Vinyl (Miles 012 7"). Not to be confused with the disco duos, Doma Summer is a white Brooklyn boy named Jason Forrest, who now goes under the name **DEESENSEMAN**, **Jason Forrest** presumably for legal reasons. Forrest, comes out of the creative end of the bootleg/bastard pop/era that raged in these waters a couple of years ago, along with artists such as Daughnagle, Dunn Dunn Deen and Kneifheadshop. "Wooden Karava" is a cheery "shaken not stirred" type lounge lizard sea spiced with droll 'n' bass, while "David And Iggy On Vinyl" is entirely made up of Clash samples and cut-up interviews with David Bowie saying things like "uh, I dunno" and "incredible rock", while Iggy pop giggles that he had "done" something foolish the night before and was "unburned" on the late '70s American TV series *One Shore*. "Why I Love Styx" is the name suggests, a treatment of everyone's favourite 70s FM drivetime outfit, sampled and populated into a disco anachronism. (AHN)

**Keith John Adams** (pseudonym neighbour of Lewis Furey) has recorded another great, non-programmatic pop fury, this is a *Six Track EP* (Kubelikosse 10005 7"), which are a far cry from his more whimsical psych-folk explorations of the recent past. Fully exploded into mod/beatbox territory, the first take on this record hits the ear like a classic lost 80s track, loose and hard with a near perfect mix of sash and grit. Some of the other tracks have more of Adams' hallmark — like toy instruments and a slightly off delivery that recalls Pulp. Or something. But this EP has a much more full-blown sound than was expected, and it works. Go get blown to bits! You'll be glad you did. (BC)

**Keith Reid's "Drugs"** is the main source material for Keith John Adams' (Debut: MCDR001 3" CD). **But Assassins** (aka Dave Henson of Gwyll-Llo) employs a glitchy, kooky musical production style that is paired with Mr Keith's vocals in a way that makes for a nice trash companion of anything that might seem inedibly familiar. At any rate, the presence of Reid, given the proceedings more open than most glitch-oriented noise. And the packaging is really pretty nice. The CD is packed in a plastic case that's held inside a small Ziploc bag that

has what one assumes is some benign substance masquerading as drug proper. It's something of a long shot that it'll ever be busted enough to sample it, but maybe you've made of stronger stuff, pard? (BC)

Recording as **Scott**, Maria Schneider (an associate of the Chicago wing of Midwest US electronics wonnery) has issued the *Entangled EP* (Ghost Arords GAD004 3" CD). Both sides of the single are in the style you might expect, song ancient new wave synth esque to conjure up images of the Residents, Schwip and the most hideously packed wing of the British synthwave combos. Of course, true to form, Mr Bon takes these little pieces and fashions them into something rather original and confounding, since one is never sure where the tribute part leaves off and the bootleg begins. This sense of confusion gives the listener aotta bizza. So it's probably best to just let it spin and sit back on your hosesides, wondering, "Who? What? Where? Why? Where?" (BC)

From Manchester comes **Hijack** by **Chapple/Honey/Bibby** (RSI Live003 3" CD). Of Arch Chapple, percussionist JJ Howard, and electronics maven Garry Bibby (aka Discos Operative System) recorded this track live, and it is a fairly wonderful splat of hot dusty drumwork, sunging banks of generated vox, and guitars washes of appropriated sounds. The three performers interact really well, sonically with the mood settings alternating between the players to create something real organic and spiky. It's cool to hear some of the lush, almost new wave electro textures get dismantled in the heat of the drums, but the focus is always shifting. There's a lot to listen to here, much of it extremely pleasing. (SC)

The Cristal trio hail from Richmond, Virginia (a town in which I recently had a dose of a time finding a supermarket). The only member whose name sends out hairs is Bobby Denne, who also toils for LaBrashad. Cristal's music on their eponymous debut release, *Cristal* (All Is Number AIN001 3" CD), is way more crusty than LaBrashad's, however. Using the wave-cook of homemade electronics and splicing techniques, the three create two tracks that mix drivelandscooping with surgical pens methods in a way that is sure to make you seize. By turns tiring, dark and recessive, this music feels like a sharp

fingermail circling your navel slowly inside a tightly shuttled open. Just be careful you don't have anything in the way when they decide to slam the door shut. It might hurt. (BC)

My library of underwater recordings isn't too vast, but it has expanded by one with Wavescape by Dutch composer, **Edwin Van Der Heide** (Staalplaat STMC025 3" CD). As part of an installation having to do with the function of Rotterdam as a port city, Van Der Heide looked up a bunch of underwater microphones to record the sounds of boat traffic in the harbour. He was struck by the contrast of the silences of the boats passing on the surface, and the racket they made beneath it. This must have been amazing in its original form as an installation, but even as a "near" 3" CD it's totally cool. We would have never guessed the source of the recordings without the sleeve notes. It just sounds mysterious and, especially if you're a whale, very serene-looking. I'm sure. (IC)

**Idmester** is the "now de rig" of Brighton's own sound toddler Pendle Poucher. His new release, *7th Pleasure Of Life* (Red Antenna RA 3W0002 3" CD), is an edited version of a longer project available online but is still fairly sweet in this streamlined format. Mr Poucher spouts out smoothly analog electronics delineated from the pack by excellent use of (presumably) live guitars and other humanistic touches that remove the "machine privacy" feel that marks so much similar work in this field. There are four tracks here, none of them overly long, most of them maintaining a populist melodic stance and a rather engaging overall feel. Nothing is very harsh or jarring, but the song action makes things progress in an identifiable linear pace, which is pretty hip. The title track ends with moody CB6 style vox to create something almost anyone should find rather charming. (BC)

More Midwest goryness comes in the form of *Spirits Kill By J&J* (Ghost Arords GAD002 7"). A gay/gal duo (the third J is Jesus), these young dippies seem dedicated to making sounds that simultaneously annoy with their cutsey-pie dynamics and suck you in with the incoherence of their joyful stylings (imagine Henry Trout playing the Modestes songbook). It's very possible that you would want to kill them if you saw them live, so listening to the record

may be a safe alternative. I dunno. Like, what would Jesus do? (BC)

The San Antonio, Texas DJ extra has never figured too intensely on my personal radar, but **Klaeser's** new release, *Poisoned (Exponential EXP-003 3" CD)* may well be one of his high water marks. And really, if you can stand beats, this is a pretty funny reorganization of stuff by people like The Rapture and Yeah Yeah Yeahs. Klaeser shovels all the material he selects into a fluffy cheap, ultra groovy format with chittering astringy vocal blots slathered across the top. San Antonio, it's not just about cows anymore. Who's thank it? (BC)

Musicans with Tourette's Syndrome are few and far between, but **Tessmann Greg Kingstone** is among their select number and his new release of *100 Improvisations* with Melbourne native **Will Outlive**, Hols Holar (Artbox 02 3" CD), is totally great. Kingstone plays electric guitar and keys, *Gethin* makes drums and electronics, and their collaborative stow is a thoroughly engaging trip through out sounds. The rhythms and textures lash from one topic to another with a spasmic grace. Reviewer less, the tracks have a flavor that makes me think of a smaller, less rockified version of Shoboddy. Everything's very splintered sounding, but a strange humor and manic force shines through every crack. And there are many! *Hansel* (BC)

From deep Scotland hails **Maston Granger**, a quartet whose *Maston Granger EP* (Kubelikosse KSE02 7") is a driving Directly in the line of post-leftwing groups, Maston Granger most often remind me of Minneapolis's superb NRB (and their offshoots Red House). The guitar is way upfront and plays alternately cratty and strutting its, while the rhythms blab and stab their way up through the mix and the vocals blither away in the background, with nods to both Verlaine and Cosey Behemoth. (BC)

Not just another skuzzy group from Liverpool, **Magixx** combine the Dik Mik whiz of Hiveweld with great, wild, Detroit free rock howled motion. Their debut "Spotlight Over Memphis" (Cirrus Miles CM001 7") is a hash-solid slab of mostly instrumental ego that will make you feel like you're fucking a stranger in a field of his deep mad. And digging it. Get down to the pretty music. (BC) — Reviewed by Byron Coley and Annie Heide Nestor

were the Lower to disappear from the singer's life. For while these are shorter, punchier, more urgent tracks, there is still the strong hinting of a wider, more disorienting tension that exists way beyond the stilling intimate concerns of 'soul' & 'self'. This is signified by Diagram's peaking trumpet, Malin's violin, or what sounds like an understated marimba deployed on 'Little Sister'.

There's an occasional lurching or lilt in these songs that in part derives from the semi-improvisatory way in which they are recorded. Hence the physical uncertainty of this music, a feeling of faint and distant existential terror which quivers through Thomas's entire body of work. It's nowhere more evident than on the closing "Prepare For The End", a distant, uneasy echo of "Jethro's Kingdom Comes" from the 1979 Pere Ubu album *New Picnic Time*. Whether or not this is a reflection of Thomas's religious convictions, the feeling it leaves you with is one of anathematic doubt.

#### TORTOISE IT'S ALL AROUND YOU THRILL JOCKEY THRILLITIS CD BY DAVID STRAUB

Five albums in, it's inevitable that perceptions of Tortoise are liable to be laced with irritation and envy. The vanguard of post-rock, into whose ranks Tortoise were originally commanded, may have seemed radical when it was first coined, with its intimations of elegy, of the spirit of rock, ring-snaking from the remains of pre-punk rock's ravaged corpus, free of its dead weight to disport in new shapes and dimensions. Now, however, what once seemed graceful and elegant now sounds boneless and lethargic, complacent and repetitive, the same sorts of usual suspects going through the same old motions, a lethargic equivalent of an annual Status Quo roadshow, when all's said and done.

Such is the growing suspicion, that the temptation to trumpet the said new, long-lived little reptile that is Tortoise into touch is growing. Certainly, it's All Around You offers some provocation — the grisly readings of "On The Chin", the partly coquy "Stretch (You Are All Right)", and, like the majority of CO releases, it's All Around You is simply too long.

In fairness, however, the year John McEntire and co spent crafting this album hasn't been in vain. Although there are no new dimensions here, no miraculous breakthrough into post-post-rock, this still feels like musical fresh meat. Take the title track, which exhibits deliberately fudged and

distressed bossanova rhythms, or the computer-generated buppenweh imitations of "The Lithium Softs"; the decaying, John Barry-esque chords of "Crest"; there's a certain déjà vu about these exercises in déjà vu, these restaging of old forms of perfect pop, perceived through a glass of sublime nostalgia for that which never actually existed in the first place. And yet, they all shimmer, as does "Eye/Eye" with its startling, cuteness and nostalgia.

If this music does indeed represent a form of mourning for a vanished state of musical grace that can now only be revisited by dangerous and modish methods, then it is a period of mourning that has not quite yet entered. It's All Around You has a longing, aching quality to it which still has the capacity to infect the listener.

#### NICK TOSCHES FUCK THE LIVING FUCK THE DEAD LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'AIGLE DISA9402 CD BY BLODTON BUTCHER

In March 2005, when this spoken word performance was recorded at Paris' Centre Pompidou, Nick Tosches was enjoying the fruits of a mid-autumn bise. He had recently completed his contrary assessments of Sonny Liston and Emmett Miller and had begun his third novel, *In The Hand Of Death*, a monstrous hybrid of crime thriller and lyrical exegesis. The poems and prayers Tosches had left in his Parisian audience attempt much the same synthesis.

It doesn't always work. For all his resources, Tosches is not a great reader. He blurs New Jersey bluster as well suited to wavy routines but, here, it makes mincemeat of purple passages and classical references. His ponderous, bombastic delivery often obscures the sense of his sentences and he botches at least two well posted punchlines. The fault is not so much languished syntax on the page as Tosches's shortness of breath. Tellingly, the disconcerting click of a cigarette lighter is frequently audible.

Cigarmen are a favourite subject. Tosches invites his audience to smoke and tells the "true story" of "A Cigarette With God". This is an extraordinary piece of writing, full of savagery, hamster and grim poetry but Tosches fuses it with bad effects. He sounds snappy when he might be circums, muddled rather than fierce. His peddling narration does give justice to the vigour of his imagery and the changing shape of his spoken imagination.

The highlight of this performance comes at the end of the set when he is joined by Patti Smith. After a shaky start, Smith delivers a stirring version of "Wild Leaves", written for Robert Mapplethorpe's 41st birthday in 1987. She is shortly joined by Tchicay, reciting passages from Coptic texts Of Ritual Power and the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Staggered, this blend of truculence and lamentation works. Smith's deadpan energies win Tchicay's banal rage, like plumes of incense smoke twisting together, to produce a sense of holy torz. Wholly appropriate.

#### STAN TRACEY & EVAN PARKER SUSPENSIONS AND ANTICIPATIONS PB04000 CD BY JULIAN COWLEY

The unquestionable integrity of Stan Tracey's defining contribution to the British jazz scene since the 1950s, as pianist and composer, has perhaps hindered full recognition of his distinctiveness as an improvising musician. His rugged style has been personified far beyond early emulation of Ellington and Monk, even though they remain crucial points of reference. The extent of Tracey's willingness to adapt and take risks has been especially evident in challenging pieces he's entered into with musicians some years younger than himself. During the 1970s he made memorable duet recordings with fellow pianist Keith Tippett and saxophonists John Surman and Mike Osborne. On *Suspensions And Anticipations* he's in dialogue with the most naked sausaghe player of that generation, Evan Parker.

Parker is still seeking diverse occasions for testing and extending his formidable technique and musical imagination. He took his turn to this 2003 meeting with Tracey, a turn on which the inevitable sounds rebirthed more connected with jazz antecedents than an sasimi. Warm-toned and melodically fluent throughout, Parker actually dedicates a brief solo to midcentury Sonny Rollins, an implied presence in much of Parker's recent liner work. He sounds unusually mellow as he gravitates explicitly towards the jazz heartland, but the elements of instrumental control and fine judgment that have shaped his intense voyages into previously uncharted sausaghe space remain as pronounced as ever.

Tracey, who contributes two pithy solo pieces,

bases his familiar attack and emphatic phrasing to their eight duets. He also draws upon a prodigious compositional ear in his deployment of shrewd modal voicings and inventive juxtapositions that not only reflect, prompt and respond but also provide set settings for Parker's burnished blowing. The pleasurable ambivalence to plot this September session may unsettling some listeners already struggling to come to terms with unorthodox guitarism. One of Tracey's decisions to record a set of ballads is the broader picture, however, it draws an underexposed facet of Parker's extraordinary musicianship into the light and serves as a welcome reminder that Stan Tracey, now 77, has given us far more than just the brilliant 1985 suite *Under Milk Wood*, which remains his best known work.

#### TRAPPIST BALLROOM THRILL JOCKEY THRILL141 CD BRANDLIMAYR/ DAEFLDECKER/NÉMETH/ SIEWERT DIE INSTABILITÄT DER SYMMETRIE BODRUGA/BODRUGA/GROBASAT CD KAPITAL BAND 1 2CD MUSIK 01 2400 BY ROB YOUNG

A common approach extends across the work of anything involving guitarist Martin Siewert and/or electronics operator Werner Oberhauser, as it does their peers such as Oren Ambarchi, Martin Ng, Dean Roberts, Ravi Persiani and Mattin. It involves a stubborn refusal to incorporating digital interweaving into live performance. But unlike the generation of improvers that includes AMM, these younger players have bypassed the testing sounds of ideological battles that sputtered and roared the 1970s. Improv trumps and they're not too cowed by free music dogma to inject groove and sustained energy when it feels right.

Vannia Martin Bandinay has been slyly spreading himself across a tangle number of recordings over the past couple of years. He is the drummer in electronic/post-rock outfit Radian and performs regularly with Siewert. His disc record *Wiebeautiful* (Ikarus) was one of the best Ensemble releases of 2003. In the fragit, trio with Siewert and bassist Joe Williamson, instead of the drums as the backbone of a

# Rolf & Fonky

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# The Compiler

Various artists: reviewed, rated, reviled

Overviews: David Gresham

"Memory is nothing but implanted sequences and narratives as evidence." Such is the rhetorical remark posted by Break Sermons on the sleeve to *Twining Dreams And Shifting Harbours* (Beau Ridge BD-02). The various artists here provide a patchwork musical contribution to the Kidnapping Europe Art Project, details of which can be found at [www.kidnappingeurope.net](http://www.kidnappingeurope.net). The installation's broad aims are in part expounded in a manifesto by Sermons accompanying this album, entitled "The Alchemy Of Memory Through Formulas For Identity". The gist of his argument is that notions of what constitutes "Europeanness" are too often fictional constructs based on subjective, geographically limited and recent experiences. These often of-gilding concepts deny both the history and diversity of what it means to be European. Kidnapping Europe is nothing less than an attempt to "reinvent collective memory", this time with outcomes based in complex and fragmented reality rather than myth.

Despite the formidably artful and virtuous nature of this modest project, the music is surprisingly gentle, initially at any rate. Two years in the compiling, and featuring artists ranging from David Grubbs to various European, "twining" Dreams sets out in playful pseudo-American vein with James Merle Thomas's "The Ballad Of Queenie Nine". Successive contributions such as Ingvar O'Hopesh, however, gradually drift away from the insistent folksiness, as if to reveal the untruthfulness of such sounds. It's like moving from home on the rug to The Penguin Cafe Orchestra. To the distant contemplation of folk you'll find in Jimi Hendrix's music, into post-rock tempos with Jakob Eberle's "French Journey". By the time you reach Jan Thøgersen's "Banana Peel On The Balcony Of Buckingham Palace", "folk" has prostate. He's dying acoording, wheezing it's last. Enter David Grubbs with "A Faced Of Land", twirling and droplets of guitar across a swelling, radioactive bed of synth. Overall, a musical journey that takes little persuading to pick you up but drops you off a long, long way from where you started out. (DS)

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of his Comtorium label, Iain Thøgersen has released a limited edition CD accompanied by a set of striking postcards, *Belle Code* (Comtorium CD12 CD). Striking, price, it's free. Don't dash, the CDs are already gone, but everything can be downloaded as free MP3 files from Thøgersen's Website ([www.comtorium.net](http://www.comtorium.net)). A Springfield, Missouri born "transgendered electroacoustic musician" now relocated to Tokyo, Thøgersen has a wide range of concerns with gender and sexuality issues in popular and electronic music. These sometimes lead him up cals de so rank with academic sniffs, where music is approved of

because of its transgressive agenda or selfconscious decadence, rather than because it's any good. The opener, Riverside SD/SD's "Torn And Trauma", with its dodgy wools and intellectual campfire, is a worrying start.

Christopher Pennoch's "Sympathy For A Clump" is computerised nature and bonal robot talk; and having boulder Los Ferengi (he played TV's Incredibly Hulk) on your answer machine would be fine if he had anything to say. He doesn't. After the opening trio of clunkers, things improve. Echelon's processed little girl's voice is simple and sweet, Yesterday's Heroes (Thom Yorke plus Japanese singer Haco) a ferociously minimalist disco, and Scarce know what they are up to with their strings, tubles and moody vocal cut-ups. Takeshi Koyama has worked with Domo Arigato and Haco's ViennaMoto, and contributes a good computer piece. The straightforwardly Ambient track will work: Brian Ganson has a yeast yeast drinking away in the sun, and "Irene Loves Robin" is Thøgersen getting saucious with Scanner Ultra-red and Simon Fisher Turner: come up to us, so we should forgive Thøgersen's recordings of family members singing and playing accordion waltzes. Atopside humour of paternising irony? In Thøgersen's world it's fine. (CB)

Accompanying Guide Van Rijn's book on the same topic, *The Twinner And Eisenhower: Black-American Blues And Gospel Songs, 1945-1960* (Agnus Black ABCD019 CD) is a window onto a black political expression of the mid-20th century. Changing times are seen through the eyes of blues, R&B and gospel singers, from Josh White's sentimental acoustic tribute to Roosevelt, to Bobo Jenkins's Chess-style electric guitar and harmonica on the 1954 "Democratic Blues"; to JBL Lester's "Eisenhower Blues" – according to Van Rijn the most bitter and personal attack on the president. Starting with post-war fears about inflation, moving through the atomic age and the Korean war, and ending with Brother Bill Hartson's account of the Alabama Bus Boycott of the mid-50s, the collection is partly a narrative about the use of explicit political criticism – one starts to find names being named, as in the Gospel Progress' "I'm So Grateful To The NAACP", which refers to the trial of three young black men accused of raping a white girl in Greenwood, Florida, in 1943. "Attorney Alverman along with the ADP/Appeal to the court for the innocent three/That they might live, as we all know,erry/berry/Bearspire reporter Ted Poston made it known," But what makes this such a wise compilation is the way Van Rijn's political references points always in a lot of musically heterogeneous material. You get the blues piano of Champion Jack Dupree alongside smoothly swinging big band numbers such as Cousin Joe's "Post-War Future Blues"

and Smokey Hogg's more rustic Texas guitar. There are upbeat dance numbers such as Jack McVee's smazy saxophone-led "Infection Blues", as well as the vibrant, swooping four-part vocal harmonies of The Golden Gate Quartet, or The Pilgrim Travellers' snapper and more urgent gospel in "Jesus Hits Like The Atom Bomb". And then there are standalone masterpieces such as Josh White's performance of "Free And Equal Blues" in 1946, singing both for White's political courage and the slick, word-juggling humour of the song, which approaches issues of race and class through molecular science – "Why those men who think they're nobly/Dadz even know that the couplet's got a glow" – it makes for a highly original cross-section of blues and gospel during changing times. (MV)

In 1977, Elvis Costello wrote two seething but concise songs clocking in under two minutes, "Welcome To The Working Week" and "Mystery Dance". Now Womadhamboobie label and arranger The Jonson Family have compiled 39 ads and The Twinkiehouse (Jonson Family JF011 CD), and no task crosses that two minute barrier. Originally conceived as homage to early 1980s US underground heroes like The Minutemen, the collection is mainly from heroes for anyone going through an "all rock is shit" depression. We are largely in Joni Lee Peel land – v'm guitars, reverbising – and the two bookenders are wonderfully eccentric Birmingham's Grover play backwoods, and Lorde and famous about hoising in. In between, Reynolds construct a miniature Garage symphony, the whinging vocal spelt from an answer machine Aga Vista World echolocashed Marian guitars, Regis gas dreamy, Poplar explore a Post-Soviet world, and bugman's I'm Being Good show they can still uniquely up to us. A couple of tracks over distorted hardcore rage, but the general mood is smart and relaxed, in an underground apris-punk manner, you understand. Perfunctorian echo Costello's legacy by managing a concise pop song, teaching us the singing chorus are even finding time to switch to Italian in the middle eight. (CB)

Tom Smith is a disgruntled pessimist, his sleeveveins held whirring, his foot membranes of his semi failed Tora Tora Po-Po's weekend in Atlanta, Georgia. *Tarot: Tarot: Memos Of A P.M. Festival* (The Shred Shine ISR1003 CD) is a five document of 8-8 December 1996, at Dotter's club, and despite an alleged 16 track digital recording, it remains shockingly flat. Wade through a slush pile of average guitar groups and some more unusual items crop up, perenially, near disc's end. Before them, Bobbi Corn opens with an imitating nursery rhyme throwaway; Alvin scratch out their messy folk rock, and Anseba are ditheringly feoced. *Deep Blood Moustache* fit

proceedings with some lovingly slow scraping, Eugene Chadbourne provides welcome banjo contrast and Harry Pussy focus their mirth. Liquidball build up a rambling momentum topped with seagov guitar, then Lorrie Cannon accumulates sustain and releases it in crashing waves. The contorted, compressed Mononona and dense power of The Flying Luttenbachers should have been sequenced earlier to secure indecisive voters. (MV)

Soaring from a big country: across 22 tracks and two CDs, *Native: Musician In Australian Sound* (Preservation PR0032 ZCD) offers a broad church of contemporary musical tendencies, embracing pop electronics, minimalist drones, retro minimalist guitars, low temperature sun and glitch work, sweaty improvisation, a choir of dot matrix prints, and much more. As a survey of new Australian music, it certainly demonstrates that there's plenty going on, even if the country's musical culture is reviled by many of those who belong to it. There's no identifiable regional style – no sense of the city-orientated self-branding sub-sections of European electronics. Apart from Alex Lamb's outback-sound piece, this is music without an accent. What holds the tracks together is the thoughtful programming of the compilation, which cuts out the generic latrines. Some established names weigh in with excellent material, besides Lamb (who offers a gorgeous 'stomming the wilderness' piece). Oren Ambarchi contributes a typically warm and hypnotic assembly of loops, Primrose's track is an energetic burbling, shimmering composition that combines approachability and smart crafting. Jim Denley features on a fine piece by Mago recording artist GCTCATC, who processes his Burek into a crackling, morphing beat without losing sight of the quirks of the source playing. Of the lesser known contributors, highlights include Chris Smither's guitar larch, which creates a twang-filled oriental garden; the nasty, bented throats of Joyce Wieland's drone, and Scott Horowitz's mesmeric "Eleven Guitars" (three more than feature on his excellent recent album *8 Guitars* on Sunchild's offshoot Quicksilver). As a compilation, a balloon is struck between that of Joyce Wieland's drone, GCTCATC, (Brendan Wall) and pants in between. The sweet bits were overwrought for my taste, but others might get carried along on the momentum of the selection, as it's not one of those compilations that has you programming out the data from the second listen in. On the contrary, the album should encourage listeners to dig deeper into Australian music. (MV)

Reviewed by Clive Bell, Matt Fytche, Martin Longley and Will Montgomery



piece — the spine around which the music's flesh hangs — Bandstinger weaves his kit sound into a membrane or coat that envelopes the whole endeavor, covering Stewart's rear as he gleefully paces a path through the mark with luminous plucks. "Observers Risk Pain" shows a funkier side of Trapet than was revealed on last year's *Highway My Friend* (Thyology). The group now sound telepathically close knit.

The *Assassinat Der Symmetrie* was recorded in the MAK art space in Vienna, accompanying a video work by Michaela Grill which, judging by the cover, involves a lot of sky seen through a mesh of streetlights and electricity pylons. The quartet calibrate their playing to the imagery, synth players Stefan Nitsch and Werner Diderichsen transmuting electric disturbances and Busser's percussive strikes into Bandstinger's fluctuating grid.

Kapital Band 1 — *Brand New's* duos with Nicholas Busser — is a kind of conceptual and with a faint whiff of clever design. A double CD package turns out to hold one disc of music, and one blank CD-R. A dashed-up booklet, with an instruction to "Cut them into two CD sleeves", offers tacit encouragement to disassemble and propagate. It's impossible to tell how much of this was played as heard, and how much is conjured in the edit; for the to-ing and fro-ing between close-miked percussions and Busser's scuttling laptop disrupts your imagined sense of music occurring in a room, in real time.

**VARIOUS**  
**ELECTRIC PURE LAND STARS**  
DEAD FLOWER JDF0001 CD + DVD  
**GENYA 1971.8.14-18**  
HAKUBA LANDINGS FLPL0001 3DVD + DVD  
**INSPIRATION & POWER 14**  
FREE JAZZ FESTIVAL 1  
POZUONIC MTC0001 2DVD  
BY ALAN CUNNINGHAM

The first half of the 70s was a boom period for music festivals in Japan, reflecting a lingering belief in collective experience not stoked by the slow death of the student movement. The happy-dappy folk jambonics of the late 60s began to be infiltrated by militant acid rock and free jazz sounds from 1971 onwards. The result was a fertile musical and political Petri dish out of which new cross-pollinations of subversive music began to emerge. These three releases provide valuable documentary evidence of the role that these festivals played in cultivating the early sounds of the Japanese underground.

*Electric Pure Land Stars* focuses on the much-mythologized and bootlegged Tokyo free rock festival of the 70s, revealing a very mixed bag of lost material by Leo Rallies, Denoues, Kishi Hana's first group, Los Assauft, and hangars on like hippy rocker Measai Misami. Highlights are a late Los Assauft track, revealing an unknown star space rock dimension to their more usual jazz based deconstructions and a solo track by Rallies member Hiroshi which suggests his basic heavy plod was as pivotal the Rallies mystery as leader Matsuri's feedback expressiveness. The sound throughout is only of archival quality. The visual material on the DVD is a real find, with a rare daylight performance by Rallies at an outdoor festival in 1976, and a lengthy, trebly supergroup jam from 1974, featuring a very young Hano (shades and hair already present and correct), Moutain, Minmax, Acid Seven and many others.

Jazz critic Tetsuo Saitoja produced *Inspiration & Power*, Japan's first festival of free jazz, in Tokyo over 14 consecutive nights in June and July 1973. Virtually every Japanese free jazz player, apart from the hospitalized Keiichi Abe, appeared. Extracts from the concerts were released as a double album, now released as part of Polystar's ambitious free jazz series. Some of the playing seems still to be struggling towards a response to recent American series by Miles Davis and Gil Evans, but there are also players who have developed voices of their own, which even nothing to the Americans. Motohara Yoshizawa presents a fabious emotionally flowing piece for solo bass that fluidly develops extended techniques in both arco and pizzicato modes. Also of note are a typically dense and hotly dense of propulsive dynamism from the Yosuke Yamashita Wo, and the only recording by The New Music Ensemble, a group of jazz radicals who used exhilarating volume, physical performance, gamelan theatre, and even strobe lighting to explode the conventional relationship between audiences and musicians. But the overwhelming highlight is the toro by guitar feedback virtuoso Masayuki Miyazaki Takayagawa's *New Direction For The Arts*. Representing just the final ten minutes of an hour long set, this is an uncompromisingly intense explosion of collective energy, driven by twin drummers and a cellist, with Takayagawa's guitar seemingly everywhere at once.

The most legendary and controversial of all the 70s festivals was the 1971 Genya festival, organised as part of the violent resistance by local farmers against forlorn land seizures for the construction of a new Tokyo airport. Originally a double album but now laudably repackaged with a DVD, *Genya* provides a stunning vэнти- style document of the feasted festival, peppered with interviews, performance snippets and fractious arguments. Tensions immediately surfaced between the locals' expectations of a traditional summer festival and the radical lineup that young activists had booked, with the protesters getting very much the worst of it.

Masayuki Takayagawa's group and The Motors taking two both put in seassome, squealing and howling performances that the rural locals try to shout down with rhythmic chanting. Blues rockers Dew and Blues Creation do slightly better, their simpler rhythms at least providing a stalwart, describable beat. Ramshackle guitar and bongo polyrhythms from Kaneko Kosuke finally manage to unite urban hippies and rural revolutionaries with snappily titled ditties like "Proclamation Of Ward Revolutionary War" and "Get Your Gun". Desperately lost, Assauft, in just their third performance, were chosen to headline. The group apparently went all out to desecrate the noise of the collective. Aggressively hammered piano, chaotic drums and Hiroto's deliberately didactic screams and purples did the trick, antagonising the audience into raining down bottles or the stage. The performance was a symbolic moment — the former's last stronghold was smashed by the riot police a week later.

**VARIOUS**  
**THE PURPLE CUCUMBER**  
AUDITORIUM ALD0004 CD  
BY KATH MOLINE

The Purple Cucumber documents a tribute concert to Frank Zappa held on 30 April 1995 in a rather more interesting way than is often the

case with this type of project. On the evening in question a select cadre of the great and the good in Belgian New Music circles presented a selection of their own pieces inspired by, and quoting from, some of the Man in the Chair's key compositions. In addition to orchestral pieces recalling Zappa's own 'classical' works recorded by The Ensemble Modern as *The Yellow Shirt*, these works feature contributions from an eclectic ensemble which includes vocalists Robert Martin, a Zappa regular in the 80s.

Some people subscribe to the view that the best Zappa/Mothers material is that in which the leader's occasionally became possessed is least evident, in which case these divertingly complex, primarily instrumental pieces are bound to find favour. X-Legged Sally's Peter Vennezeich convulses four short pieces full of knotty, colourful string writing and George De Keser makes full use of the group for the 'Zuohin Rocking Teenage Combie', as the sleeve has it. On his come-up of "Brown Shoes Don't Make It", inevitably, not all of it works. None of the contestants attempts to get to grips with the elements of Zappa's music that were truly his own, particularly the uniquely trigonic 'bogus pomp' of his melodic sensibility. Martie does his best to emulate His Master's Sheer on a rerun of "The Fortune Never Stops" but fails well short. Occasionally, and not a little ironically, considering this is supposed to be a tribute, the album points up the shortcomings present even in Zappa's best early work. Claude Coppens interleaves a reined update of Jonathan Swift's satirically laugher in *cheek polonio A Modest Proposal* with musical quotations from the Mothers' classic "Concentration Moon", proving only by such a comparison that even at his most sociologically incisive, Zappa lacked the focus and passion of a true satirist. Nevertheless, *Yellow Shirt* excepted, this probably says more about why Zappa was a giant than anything released in the man's name since the Indian summer of 1979's *Sleep Det.*

**VIA TANIA**  
**UNDER A DIFFERENT SKY**  
CHOCOLATE INDUSTRIES CH0094 CD  
BY MARTIN LONGLEY

Tania May Bowers has now returned to her Melbourne home, but this solo debut is the result of a recent, fruitful spell in Chicago. Here the former singer and bassist for Sydney four piece SPOFFY WIND winds down into a new incarnation as an electroacoustic singer/ songwriter, achieving the ultimate in distaste's latents reversion. Guest appearances by guitar legend Premae T3, Sot Henni and Sean's guitar footer Howe Gob perfectly illustrate the ayo straddling postures adopted for these sessions. Others invited to the party include Tortoise's John McEndon and hard blues experimenter Chris Brokaw.

"Dream Again" is made up of lurching, bended beats, Tania's lost vocals buffered between Pretzel T3's chattering, inserted break-ups. The ayoostics are offhandedly, stripping away self-aggrandized electro piano and snare rolls. She slurs through "Bobaniki", part jazz whisper, part country moon, easing towards the brooding "In The Distance", her thickly peured bass smothering God's tiny fills. The arrival of Brokaw or two mid-disc tracks lends a heavier hand of urear, his fractured guitar slamming into the dub

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# The Boomerang

## New reissues: rated on the rebound

Gone to earth: The Waterstones

The role and purpose of folk music has altered significantly in the post-war era. Once the iteration of the here and now, folk music has become a vessel of preservation; we look to the folk section of a record shop for voices that echo out of the past, not for an index of our own community. Born of a mixture of Huguenot and Catholic ancestry with a dash of Gypsy blood, the first family of British folk music, The Waterstones, were considered outsiders and treated with mistrust by their near-cointer-  
nating neighbours in Kingston-Upon-Hull during the 1940s. They could whistle the air long before Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, and in the conservative folk scene, they were more than a whiff of rebellion, of exile about their endeavours. Travelling For A Living, a 1966 BBC documentary on the family recorded on the cusp of their wider fame, catches their otherness in stark black and white: the airdy twine of the voices of sisters Norma and Elsie (Lil), brother Mike and their young middle class cousin (and son-in-law) John. Harrison brings a jolting blend of England's pagan roots into the cosy folk clubs they regularly gig at. The film comes on a DVD included with the slightly River of Song (Topic TSCD04002 4CD+DVD) a collection of almost 100 songs compiled by David Gaff. From the earliest wassailing songs recorded in from 1964 right up to more recent permutations of this dynasty into which vocalist Martin Carthy married to Norma Waterstone's wife with Norma, Elsie, and now by his daughter, Elsie, it cannot be called complete, but it affords a sweeping panorama of an extended family caught up in tributaries of Song.

For most of the 80s, Norma, Mike and Lil Waterstone would make infrequent trips to Cecil Sharp House in London, the nation's largest folk archive, in search of repertory. Given their dedication to authentic music, it's hard to keep in mind that they were considered unorthodox Britons, with all the English suspicion that goes along with that. And for 21st century ears, it's hard to hear past the sheer hay-hey-no-yesss of some of this stuff. Compared with the tub-thumps of today's deduced MCs, Mike Waterstone's nasal Hamboende delivery can trudge like a farmer walking the plough through a desolate, Shire horse. But the doggedness has a weight and a determination, an immersion in experience that starts to affect you deeply after prolonged exposure. Before they began writing their own material, the song mix would cover tiles from the seafaring port harbour life of Hull, with all the in- and outfalls of European/North Sea.

commodification obscured by that town during its 19th century heyday. Smuttorously their songbook tapped a rich vessel of pre-Christian folk song, with pagan, rural and ceremonial

themes. In the early 70s, the lumpen Sheekey Span would adopt and adapt their style of glee singing and clap it in the leg-iron of rock 'n' roll. The Waterstones made no attempts to falsify modernise their style, even as they have continued to prevail during the 80s and beyond; almost all the music here is for voices alone.

Their dense weft of Neoclydian harmony comes like an aroid out of the Celtic-derived troubadour and courtly music of the early middle ages. The pagan roots leads to a preoccupation of earthbound imagery. Characters in songs are trying to rescue the farmer's daughter, hefting agricultural instruments, digging cattle off to market, or simply bumbling over it. The more bucolic ditties such as "I Went To Market", "Children In The Garden" and "Ring-a-ring Bannya Tinkles", are complemented by blazing blues songs such as "My Song", "The Prickle Holy Bush" and "The Waledaughters' John Bell". Gaff has ticked down a wagerload of unreleased tapes, some of the most affecting. The early "Blood Red Roses", recorded in some pub when the troupe were still known as The Folktones, rings out like a spring song. Since the end of the 60s they have fragmented into an ever changing series of continuities (Norma, improbably, became a DJ in the Caribbean for a while), and have created a body of Waterstones-penned songs too. The major omission from this box is the 1972 LP by Mike & Lil, Bright Phoenix, a luminous set whose songs just seemed to visit them like a dream. With permission to license that album derived by its current holder, Celtic Music, three demos for the record from the family's private collection have to suffice (a CD release is long overdue).

Although presented with a good deal less arcanic baggage than America's currently seed-up musical heritage, these are among Britain's cheeriest equivalents to the Lorina archive, the Carter family, even the Harry Smith Anthology. The next generation of this mischievously musical dynasty, represented on the final disc, have been born into an ever wider river of song than their parents, ensuring a future without cease. (RY)

**Yellow Magic Orchestra's *Atomikos*** (Epic 5134502 CD), first released in 1981, probably represented the Japanese electronic pioneers' most acerbic. Though it opens with the economic "Punk Jam", a microludic paean to a moshheap arena of broad, the lexicon of repetitive, sand-dusted drums, honky off-kilter loops and wobberous kloshes of sound have suggested a group who had at least found an alternative model of synthpop to the apparently all-dominating Kling-Klang model established by Kraftwerk. Tracks like "Seed Music" in particular reflect the growing urban audacity and invention



of the Far East, much as Kraftwerk had apparently celebrated the rise of the industrial/mechanical era in the West. As with Hutter and co, there's an implied irony in the clobdark banality with which they go about their business, an irony multiplied by the cover image, a plausibly Tatortfiken Art image of a clapping female Party loyalist, as if YMO are silently aware that all is not quite so upbeat as they paint it.

Also released in their debut 1978 album *Yellow Magic Orchestra* (Epic 513445 2CD), which here includes its American version. By contrast with *Atomikos*, its pan-eurocentric, although intrinsically lyrical, feels rather even faintly insipid in retrospect, as if Prince Philip had been asked to make a synthpop album in an also 'oriental' style. Released too is *Naughty Boys + Insomniacs* (Epic 513451 2CD), whose boxy synthpop is surprisingly stirring in places, especially on "Expected Way", though it also shows how they had boxed themselves in.

The *Atomikos* disc would point to the future for each of YMO's personnel. (OS)

**Thick Piggy's** less than appealing name notwithstanding, *Two Cozy Cowboys* (JHM JHM02342 CD) and *Minerva Cat* (JHM JHM02381 CD) – from 1984 and 1991 respectively – pay more of today's alternative music to steeme. The New York duo can Carter Burwell (the now Coen brothers' soundtrack composer of choice) and singer Shantae Miranda. In 1983, they left America for Europe, where they honed up American folk and their *Crepuscule* Art world connections ten deep. Miranda was in Dan Graham's group CRM, with Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon and Malinda's Christine Heint, and Thick Piggy's sleeve is won by Lawrence Weiner 20 years later, *Two Cozy Cowboys* as the epigee set: it's also nearly impossible to date, neither the sparse electronica nor Miranda's deliberately flattened vocals giving anything away. The album brought NYC to Münster – you can hear the Northern English influence in the doomy synth lines of "Sudan" or the driving instrumental "Nuns + Soldiers". No surprise, then, to find Steve Morris, then of Joy Division, on drums, and a pre-New Order Gillian Gilbert on keyboards. In retrospect, it prefigures the experimentation of early Techno. By the time the Pigpigs became DJ Balm's *Crepuscule* for Miranda Cat, changes have been wrought. Now working essentially as a duo (but with guests such as Iggy Pop and Arthur Russell), songs have been tightened up and the accouplements of the earlier album ditched for a smoother sound. Extra track "Miserere Te" is a dispassionate take on eroticism if ever there was one. Two unexpectedly rewarding albums still capable of pointing in new directions. (LS)

"Play faster but slower!" Such were the instructions issued by Factory producer Martin Hannett to *A Certain Ratio*, whose 1981 album *To Each...* (Universal Sound USCD1 CD) is given its second release, following a 1994 reissue on Creation. ACR may have mimicked Manorcman imprecations under their breath, but as ever with the deceptively addled Hannett, they realised what he meant and made it work. *To Each...* was the magnificent upshot of a group locked between the impenetrables of funk and anti-funk, dance and avant-Goth. Its original release was overshadowed by accusations of "fascist tendencies", with even Private Eye railing against the group. Certainly, the album's artwork appears steadily provocative, considering the concurrent controversy over Joy Division/New Order's monikers. Unfortunately, this furor deflected attention from the merits of *To Each...*, whose clipped, last-trumpet blasts of brass, elephantic basslines, obscure and gassy bananages of Industrial, Ambient noise and Heart Of Oakiness-style exorcisms into rhythms amount to a towering monument in the early dodecalic heyday of punk/unk. "Forced Laugh" and "Winter Hit" still have the power to overwhelm. Here, they passed questions about the relationship between dance music and its leftfield to which, throughout the rest of the 1980s, the wrong answers were too often given. (OS)

One of the more underdog groups of the 80s New York downtown thang, Dana White's *Kook* occupied a strange refreshment, and I mean that most definitely as a compliment halfway between Liquid Liquid and Modern Romance. Before forming Kook in the early 80s, White was a saxophonist with The Lounge Lizards, and he applied that post-punkあたり (at one point, Kanik's line up included original Sonic Youth drummer Richard Edson) to a blend of funk and secondhand salsa critiqued from Lower East Side bootcamps. Tracks like "Baby Deej", "Solea Lake Nole", "Love Attack", "Your Life" and, most especially, "Kook Party" are perfect Big Apple records in that they reveal in the beauty of the city's "gigorous excess" while clipping away at the viewer and exposing the inane minutiae. The latest instalment in Soul Jazz's chronicle of Reagan-era New York, *The Story Of Kook* (Soul Jazz SJR090 CD/DVD) collects most of the highlights (sadly, minus "Do It, Do It, Do It"), "Master Cylinder's Jam" and the perfunctory jam II solo of 1989's "Kook Beat"; their mischievous war catalogue Alter Kook solo, Viola worked with disco-dub pioneer Francois Kevorkian, and this willingness to embrace both exuberance and smoothesness makes Kook the poster boys for the whole post-punk revival. (PS) □ Reviewed by Louise Gray, Peter Shapiro, David Stubbs and Rob Young

emptiness of "In the Deep." Tania coos and warbles through "Moonlight & Chase," swooping down each duet, reaching easily across swooshing strings, light chimes and underwater rumbling. "Bite" has a chilidive sheen, while "This Earth" cuts back to straight strumming, getting closest to a real-time acoustic performance. These formal turns sink in after instant listening, sending their tendrils in deep, revealing unlikely marriages between traditional instrumentation and sampled debitus. The electro Country highway is still a less travelled road, so Bowes can happily write her own bibles.

## WEIRD WAR IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, BITE 'EM DRAK MARTINS

Ian Svennson is an inadvertent pioneer. His corner has been a studied attempt to advance the history of punk rock, using influences as tools to build with rather than styles to flaunt and discard. Yet his achievements also lead to today's trend, less devoted rock. It's a most scary to revisit the stellar work of Svennson's first two groups, anthemic purveyors Nation Of Ulysses and gospel gladiators The Make-Up, and realize how many founders' retro outfits currently mine his innovations.

Lately, Svennson refuses to lounge at the brass ring of the '90k revival', and while Weird War's sound isn't too far from the groups he has influenced, it does with knowledge and experience few can match. If You Can't Beat 'Em, Bite 'Em is the group's second album (their self-titled debut was a one-off project featuring touring member Red Michael Hegerty of Royal Trux, but when Svennson's next great Scene Changes, last year's name in dispute with a group of French graffiti artists, they adopted the Weird War moniker). The album's cover, a dayglo imitation of Lou Reed's *Like a Prodigy*, is funny and deceptive. Bite 'Em is no parody, but rather a thick swirl of melted rock energy.

Previous Svennson groups mostly replicated their live sound on record, but Bite 'Em uses the studio as a weapon. This is a serious headphones album, piling toping layers of vocals, fuzzy mounds of guitar, and multiplying

basslines onto classic rock structures. Bassist Michelle Mae wraps cooing singing around Svennson's tenor rants, while guitarist Alex Minoff slaps thick guitar strings around the aural sandpaper. The beat heads out like sped-up 30 road movies. "Gated Freud" hurtles through curves. "Uking Stick" is a high speed sound chase, and the best cut, "Chemical Bank", is a blur of spaced vocals and guitar-tended guitar scratch. A few songs run out of gas, but when Bite 'Em's rollercoaster slides back to earth with the phony belled "One By One", the urge to get back on is tough to fight.

## XIU XIU FABULOUS MUSCLES TOMLAB TOSKA CD BY KEN HOLLINGS

There are probably many ways one might get a sneak peek into the soul of Jamie Stewart, the enthused singer/songwriter behind Xiu Xiu's tortured garden of torch songs and doomed anthems. You could picture him as Babsy Conn's screwed-up older brother, the dark one who doesn't talk much, goes out with guys late at night and had to move away from home for a while. Or you could imagine him trying to break up all of Faust's spousers' concerts in the high school auditorium during break and then waiting for them in the parking lot after class. Or you might catch a glimpse of him at the back of a Ziegengau Kapit in show, a staring dark cellar somewhere, a grizzly knowing smirk on his face. Perhaps the last thing you might expect from him, however, is a straight answer: "The songs on *Fabulous Muscles*," he says, "are about violence as an expression of power, child molestation, my father's suicide, disgusting painless war and trying to have hope and love to exist in the midst of all this, but having doubts that it will." An impressively inventive lyricist and performer, Stewart saves his best stuff for the truly squeamish, whether ironically describing military prostitutes against a scarred backdrop of electronic sound on "Support Our Troops OH! (Black Angels)" or begging for redemption on "Little Panda Melody".

It's exhilarating and rare to hear such bruised new performances as these, and special mention should also be made of the sensitive

combination made by multi-instrumentalists Jason Biscoff, Sean Dickens and Cory McCullough to the tense drama running throughout this collection. Painful, sweet and quite beautiful.

## DENNIS YOUNG OLD DOG: NEW TRICKS DAY & NIGHT 09 CD BY LOUISE GRAY

Better known as the percussive heart behind Liquid Liquid, the post-punk, Canisteria-era New York who unwittingly became a cult source of samples for dance visionaries ranging from Grandmaster Flash to Carl Craig, Dennis Young has lost nothing of his classic groove. While it's uncertain how many new tricks the old dog has to offer on his latest solo album, it's hardly important. As it's release demonstrates, he's plenty of life left in the old ones.

Which is not to say that there's anything retro about *Old Dog: New Tricks*. The album shows just how far ahead of their time Young and his minimal cult colleagues really were. Listening to his beautifully loosened吟 is to submit to a process of something approaching déjà vu. There are moments, as on the briliantly locomotive "Signal Up Ahead" (its urgent vocal provided by Liquid Liquid's Skeleton Principle), when one hears echoes of early House basslines from Jamie Principle and Larry Heard. It's a shock to realize that Young's percussive line (if not this track itself) has a precedent.

There's plenty to please here. Grooves, often built from cowbells, marimbas, a few guitars, dominoes. The songs, when they come, are lyrically phased. Even the wonderfully moody "Foreignness", where a quiet ay line sings a sum of persuasive drama, takes its push from a relentless rhythm. The funk comes in other forms, too. David Axle's bass constructs new frameworks around Young's voice, while Michael Gribble's trumpet provide the wild card.

Much has been made of the link between 70s minimalism, especially in its rhythmical appetitions, and 80s dance music but there's been far less concentration on the way other influences, especially freeform jazz and Latin music, slid into the broader picture. If Young, with and without Liquid Liquid, makes it easy for

a listener to anticipate Acid's groove journeys, his music also point us towards new destinations.

## RICHARD YOUNGS RIVER THROUGH HOWLING SKY JAGA JAGUAR/JAGA CD BY NICK SOUTHPAGE

The Global Conspiracy of Free-Folk Faceladen finds its Glasgow chapter fronted by intemperate troubadour Richard Young. This is his fifth solo release on the plausibly phonetic Jagajaguar and follows on from a series of collaborations with Simon Willmett-Smith as well as a recent monograph and Avid Mothers Temple high priest Maiko and DRAK MARTINS.

What Young has in common with this loose-lit confederacy is a desire to reaffirm rock's complicated relationship with intensity and authenticity. Rock long ago conflated intensity and destruction, leaving performers to choose between self-inflated hubris and hollow posturing. Here, as with the likes of the Sunburned Hand Of The Man, Demon & Nymph, Ghost, Vbrothedral Orchestra, et al, the altogether more positive intensity of the indigenous state and the shamane ritual is being rediscovered.

For *River Through Howling Sky*, Young chooses a minimal army of wily distorted but Spartan guitar, percussive, occasional electronics and his own translucently honest voice. The percussive on each track is inheqent and dolorous, each beat a lonely oar on this naked landscape. His guitar is a single noted state of woelessness, a face of naivete, out of odds with the plenitude of his own voice. The effect is to conjure up wisens of an unearled collaboration between two near namesakes, Neil Young and Young Marble Giants, the glazed one's harmonic arc flowing through the other one's skeletal sound streams.

Of the four variant meditations Young enacts here, it's "Blossom" that most competes, with its cossins of exquisitely charged silence, though the controlled elements, concentration of the other three tracks, particularly the epic "Red Cloud Singular" make them worthy companion pieces. □

**Working in warehouse spaces such as The Lab as well as institutions such as The Lab, Mills College, and San Francisco Museum Of Modern Art, 23five has consistently offered adventurous and unpredictable programming throughout the last decade including the annual *Activating The Medium* festivals. Artists sponsored by 23five include John Duncan, Christina Kubisch, Zbigniew Karkoszka, Francisco Lopez, Sugrigrup Berg, Sigmarowski, John Bissell, Achim Wollschlaeger, Joe Coley, Jiminey Nolting, Lorraine O'Grady, and many more. In 2003 we began publishing works from some of our Sponsored artists. In 2003 Scott Jenerick resigned as Executive Director and Randy You took the reins.**

### Statement of Intent

23five is a non profit organization dedicated to the development and increased awareness of second wave women in the public arena, and to the support and education of artists working with and discussing the medium of sound.

### Other activities

Randy also runs Ausculture Research, Jim works for Aquarius, The Wire and the Helen Sarasate Agency. Loren meanders through the various Jewelled Antler incarnations, and the Jenericks run Motivation Recordings.

### Future plans

Our Anthology, Dejan Yilo's survey of Chinese sound art, OM Von Hausswolff/John Duncan collaboration

# Label Lore

No: 091  
23five

### Address

P.O. Box 405051  
San Francisco  
CA 94146-0951  
USA  
www.23five.org

### Run by

Randy You, Jim Haynes, Loren Chasse, Maria Jenrek, Scott Jenerick

### Distribution

US: Roselover  
Japan: Digital Narcois/Omega Point  
Australia: Dordio

Germany: Drone  
France: Metamorphose  
Italy: Fringes

### Artist Includes

John Bissell, Ceelesteann, Michael Gondwe, Zbigniew Karkoszka & Tetsuo Furukawa, and a handful of 8THWOMA co-sponsored musicians

### Artist History

23five was founded in 1993 by Scott Jenerick as a means to promote numerous post-Industrial actions, noise spectacles and sound art happenings around San Francisco.

Info & manifesto: Jim Haynes

# Avant Rock

Reviewed by Tom Ridge

## ATTIC TED

### THE BASTARDIZED COUNTRY CARNIVAL

PECAN CRAZY POH CD

This Texas outfit's indumentary garage rockabilly is speed up with large quantities of manic absurdity. They favour golddigging blues with lots of organ and twanging guitars. Cindy Rose's babbles and raves in a series of country voices, an unholy mixture of Looney Tunes and Jim Morrison. A couple of quirky, waltzing ballads break up the general air of manic, including the obligatory mid-70s ironie cover version (*Alice Cooper's "Year's Too Short"*), as well as a baffling experimental piece towards the end which threatens to unbalance the whole album with an extended sound of a-c-f-bleeps. If you ignore the form, if you ignore art, this really does sound like bastardized Country carnival music, for better or worse.

## BALAGO

### EL SEGON PIS

FOE IN NO MURDO CD

Sampling Oval and lifting their compositions with guitars and electronic pulses, this Catalan group explore the little meeting point between electronic electronics and Ambient guitar. With the emphasis on clarity of expression and structured arrangements, a sense of order prevails at the expense of any potential brainwörthiness. But, with cod, sustained guitar tones and acid basslines alongside samples and electronics, Balago are fairly successful at extending their horizons over an album's length. For the most part, the compromise they reach between drive and dissolution works, but there remains the nagging sense of a missed opportunity here.

## BILLY MAHONIE

### DUST

TRITONE TRTH015 CD

At the tail end of the 1990s Billy Mahonie were caught up in a late British response to American post-rock, squeezed in somewhere between *Appliance* and *Electric Sound*. *Oil Joy Now* they stand refreshingly out on their own, with this crisp collection of five tracks which perfectly captures their balanced approach, combining precision-wrought bluster with melodic intricacy. It's not particularly experimental, with its roots in a base, four piece set-up, but the musicians give themselves enough room to show off their versatility. Particular highlights are the jagged, tense "Blood For Dust", which takes the kind of extended fury sprawl that characterises Duke Pond, only to bring it into sharper focus, and the lowly, reflective "Lullaby", which closes the album on an unexpectedly gentle note.

## BLACK HEART PROCESSION & SOLBAKKEN

### IN THE FISHTANK 11

KONKURRER FIGHT 1 CD

This is Konkurrer's ongoing *FishTank* series series. San Diego's brooding Black Heart Procession with Dutch Prog rockers Solbakken. The result is a successful merging of styles, placing Black Heart Procession's spectral ballads

against extended soundscapes. In other words, the collaboration effectively combines the confessional with the epic. Occupying a space in which Nick Cave, Lou and Ennio Morricone overlap, these songs have a swooping, dramatic quality midway between American and European Gothic. The blurring of boundaries prevents the project from feeling like these are opposing musical styles which have been forcibly grafted together. At the heart of the collaboration is a minimalist pulse which curbs the music's more epic tendencies and keeps the extended tracks tightly focused.

## BLONDE REDHEAD

### MISERY IS A BUTTERFLY

4AD BAD28408 CD

With 2000's *Melody Of Certain Damaged Lemons*, Blonde Redhead made a bold detour, away from their downtown NYC neo-*Ro*-Weird roots towards a more melodic, less agitated sound. Now the group have set their sights on new horizons. They've ditched the guitar pters, filed down their sharp edges and embrased instead a kind of dreampop ideal, filled out their barbed-sounding Vocals are shared between Kara Manino and Ameliee Pace, each voice a phantom mirror image of the other. This is opaque but accessible, retaining a subtle sense of velocity concurrent with dreamier refrains. Combining narrative abstraction with tangible, melodic structures, *Misery Is A Butterfly* is a rewarding new departure.

## EZ T

### GODBYE LITTLE DOLL

MONITOR MONITOR CD

Produced by Bill Gallagher, the debut album from Oakland based EZ T often sounds like *See Of Smog*. EZ T's own Michael Gaggs, perfectly captures Gallagher's uneasy mixture of otherworldiness and creation, with a similar whimsical, cracked voice, and plays his own idiosyncratic version of Country rock.

Backed by some neat alt-eara-boogie and light, reverberating country blues, Gaggs drives his tragicomic songs with a weighty air of stoicism. It's a great mixture of rock solid dynamics and quietness, with noisy outbursts and emotional peaks which elevate this above the merely dull, although Gaggs is lyrically evasive.

## LEVI FULLER

### HOW DID I GET HERE?

DENOMINATE (MFH01) CD

Originally from Boston and now based in Seattle, Levi Fuller combines folk roots elements with more contemporary alt rock rhythms, learning acoustic guitar picking with electronics and skipping polyrhythms. There's a certain haphazard charm to this, but Fuller is let down by his voice, which struggles to stay in tune and thus wrecks havoc with his music. His most successful tracks are instrumental, but they're in the minority. Fuller's lyrics read as less "heart on sleeve" stuff, but aren't quite enough to rescue his brand of a singing voice. The obligatory mid-70s cover version surfaces towards the end with a take on *Aerostich* that is desperately inadequate.

## LALI PUNA

### FAKING THE BOOKS

MOMRI MUSIC D46 CD

German group Lali Puna started as a solo project for Louise Tebeaujir before evolving into the current quartet. Tebeaujir's vocals are rendered in English and the lyrical content is pretty bleak – disatisfaction, paranoia, alienation, loss, regret. The music, however, is a streamlined combination of motorik rhythms, electronic textures and suneful choruses.

With snitch beats and pulsating electronica overlaid with smooth vocals and minimalist keyboard chords, there's a definite nod to Stereolab, but also a marked contrast between Lali Puna's catchy pop hooklines (they covered "Electric Dreams" on a Human League tribute album) and the underscored sense of weird melancholy running throughout. It's only on the last song, "Drawing By Numbers", that words and music come together in an overt display of moodiness.

## MEATY OGRE

### LEO VS PISCES

HALGAMOOGA G40010 CD

Chicago's Meaty Ogre's generous slice of piano-rock, leftfield trip-hop spreads itself pretty widely from the blues through to cosmic jazz, with plenty of diversions along the way. From psychedelic interludes through to Beat poetry, Leo Vs Pisces comes across like a confused anthology of Meaty Ogre's mood collection, featuring lyrical contributions and speed ramps alongside experimental interludes, melodic grooves and orchestrated samples. Particular highlights include the fractured duet of "Go Cubicle Notes", the satirical, wan-wish dominated "Pompanication", Inf'Pois' anti-consumist contribution "Amazing Diversions To Death" and Robert's "Tibetiborgit", where he loudly demands, "I'm not your hero/I'm just a fucking weirdo."

## MUSLINGUAZE

### JEBEL TARIO

STALPAUPT MUSLINGUAZE CD

The late Steve Jones' Muslinguaze discography is a instrumental tribute to the amphetamine pursuit of an artistic goal – he began his Muslinguaze career after Iones' invasion of the Lebanon in 1982. But his very size must repel as much as it intrigues. Where's the entry point? What defines a good Muslinguaze release from a bad one? What constitutes a typical Muslinguaze album? Does anyone own the whole set?

This is the latest Muslinguaze Muslinguaze release on the Dutch Stalpaup label, in a limited edition of 700 (complete with take note). These eight tracks are dominated by leered tribal percussions with some aqueous vocal samples and undistorted bass. They're sequenced as a single track on the CD, which is really how they should be heard to best experience their hypnotic monotony. As ethno-electronica, these Middle Eastern grooves sound pretty fine but as a fraction of Muslinguaze's massive body of work this Neo feels somehow inadequate.

## NOSTALGIA 77

### SONGS FOR MY FUNERAL

TRU THOUGHTS TRU09 CD

Bristol based Nostalgia 77 constructs jazzy vignettes with cyclical grooves with enough unconventional layering and juxtaposing to avoid wine bar blandness, even if he's not as out there as Kieran Hebden. The interest lies in the fluid mechanics of his studio constructions – seamless cut and paste artistry with few rough edges but some meaty rhythms. Feeding double bass, jazz brass and keyboards, *Songs For My Funeral* sounds organic even as it reveals, and reveals in, its studioboard origins. "The Mirror" mixes Mingus style testifying jazz with mutant HipHop, and "Metamorphosis" is high end funk with searing free jazz sax solos.

## ELIZABETH ANKA VAJAGIC

### STAND WITH THE STILLNESS OF THIS DAY

CONSTELLATION CARRS CD

Walking from Montélimar, and backed on this debut by members of Godspeed You! Black Emperor offshoot Silver Mt Zion among others, Elizabeth Anka Vajagic sings dramatically sparse songs in a husky mien which recalls the more recent Patti Smith of *None Again* or, when things get louder, Come's Thalia Zedek. The music is downbeats, semi-abstract folk and blues based, with most tracks lengthily drawn out.

Vajagic's voice is a powerful instrument, with her ease means cutting through the murky blues scrapping on "Around Here", but she lacks the sort of release, varied songs that would serve her vocals most effectively. On "With Hopes Lost" and "Where You Wonder", her voice alone really comes the songs, which sound like undeveloped rough sketches.

## WEEVIL

### DRUNK UPON LIGHT

WICHITA WICH 069 CD

On Drunk Upon Light, the London and Leeds based duo of Ten Bettis and Joey Pilcher bring some interesting electronic arrangements to bear on what are predominantly standard acoustic songs, but these don't really add up to more than the sum of their influences. The tight rhythms and pulsating, shimmering guitarics which feature alongside the guitars on this, their second album, are undermined by the quality of their songwriting. This is standard hide fare, with some also enough dual harmonies and exposed roots, revealing influences such as Beck Psychosis and New Order.

In itself this is no bad thing. It's simply that Bettis and Pilcher seem intent on locking up their creative resources into way too compartmentalised song forms, when their material would be served better if they gave themselves a bit more breathing space. When they do take a less strait approach, as on the cluttered, downbeat "Husband", the results are ultimately much more vivid. □

# Critical Beats

Reviewed by Philip Sherburne

## LAZSLO BECKETT & STEVE TAYLOR

WORK

HAND ON THE PLOW (HOTPI 12")

Despite dance maestro's emphasis on 'worker', few artists have explored the more literal implications of the phrase. All's changed with the debut release from the new London label Hand On The Plow. At the centre of the EP's first track is the vocal sample, "Now go to work/ work with what you got", Beckett and Taylor transform the statement from a House cliché into an artistic manifesto: emphasising the labour required of recombinant composition, as they go sifting through sample banks, blending with handpops, 8-bit baselines, an unlikely fleet of organ and percussive scraps reacquired from a thousand diverse tracks. "You Gotta Work" remakes the idea down to a demolition of Aufkun's old toolbeds' painstaking editing process, the clanging "Hand On The Plow", washes in shouts and clanking cowbells, like a spiritual for those who toil in digital fields, while the ecstatic "Yonder" hammers and bleeps itself into a rocket-powered combustion for sailing up and out of the physical world entirely.

## CRACKHAUS

### BLAME CANADA

MUSIQUE DISQUETTE (DISQUE2002 12")

He never much liked the harmonica, especially its appropriation, where its student tones somehow become relentlessly referential, signifying roots, authenticity, grit. But Crackhaus – the Melodious duo of Stephen Beaton and Scott Martini (Deadbeats) – deploy their leap of screaming mouth-ugly with such relentless abandon over a shuffling House skip on "Blow Brotha Blow" that it's impossible to hold it against them. "French Choc And Moonshine" is another frenetic slice of hillbilly House, all washboard glitz and Kentucky holler over densely chopped and loopy bouncy Alouette chimes in with "Mam'min" Bump In The Bush Of God", a fiddle-edited application of his 'misappropriation' method to Crackhaus's slackjawed yodels, complete with digi at the president sitting south of the Canadian border.

## LCDS SOUNDSYSTEM

### YEAH

DFA (DFA0312-12")

DFR's James Murphy is determined to stay one step ahead of his critics, "Loving My Edge" trumped charge of crutch-hunting with a tongue in cheek electro-punk ode to the blemishes of time. Now the brainlessly titled (and chorused) anthem "Yeah" comes in two versions – "Stupid" and "Presentless". The joke is on the curmudgeons because the nine minutes of the main mix are an utterly joyful celebration of getting stoned. The A-side is a hodgepodge of typical DFA elements – punny beats, gleeing live dubs, drumming, cowbells galore, meandering, mumbling – whipped into fizzy drivin' with the help of a chomping A-line. Not only does Murphy wear his self-ironinggrass like a badge of honour, he spins it until it hypotheses even the stinkiest of listeners. "Yeah" is an enormous,

enormously funky track. The "Presentless" mix is, unsurprisingly, a Progg'd out version of the original, complete with Country jones on the Rhodes and restringing congas.

## LUCIEN-N-LUCIANO

### BLIND BEHAVIOUR

PEACEFRUG (PFR032 CD)

The recent success of Berlin's Ricardo Villalobos has drawn attention to the movement of Chilean expats who are putting a curious Latin stamp on European electronic music. German's Lucien Nicoles, often billed as Luciano, is probably the second most visible figure in this scene, but his debut studio album shows an even more pronounced hybrid sensibility than his compatriots' work. Nicoles' occasional vocals, sometimes sang in Spanish, as in "Arias Breg", follow the cadence of popular Latin American forms, as do his correspondingly melodic – springs, exaggerated patterns. But Nicoles avoids the pitfalls of many ill-conceived Latin House. Even when he uses syncopated conga patterns, he corrals them digitally until only the most distant memory of the music that soured them remains. While there's nothing here as rhythmically inventive as his recent singles, the album stands out primarily for its strings, undulating pulses – percussion patterns that fibres internally sprout rattlebox tails and dissolve into fizz.

## MILOS

### MCASE EP

7" (MCASE 1 LABEL) FROM CIRSLAW 001 12"

It would be hard to come up with a less pronounced label name than "MCASE" – 1% – 1%, for a label from Bratislava (as the imprint helpfully title itself), perhaps punctuation is the only way around the language barrier. What's striking about the first release from label head Miloš Fodor is how universal the language of glitch Tech is becoming. Whatever remains of the Iron Curtain – that is, in the economic and cultural distance separating Slovakia from the West – it's clearly become porous enough to allow the passage of influences from the likes of California's Sutekh and Germany's Anyday. Fodor's four tracks are composed of the same kind of pulses and ether but through they show clear influences: they make up for it with "Silence" picks a hollow drowsy with oily blips and rearranges chopped plonkies into a strange new language. "Ich Weiss Nicht" balances eerie, unmasking tones over leaky tap harmonics and stripped gang rhymes. The record's two remaining tracks sound similarly queasy and ill at ease, as if their very forward mission fills them with vague dread.

## MONOBOK

### LOGISTIC LOG002 12"

Ruben Hooft's Molonlabe album and EP were classic, minimalist affairs founded on deep, rock solid baselines and crystalline hi-hats meeting time. Like the best Detroit Techno, they gave order to the post-industrial city by rebuilding it to the 'Naestcole' of circuitry and computer

modelling. But in this set of remakes under his Monobok alias, some kind of cosmic magnet has inhaled the futuristic clock out of sync, throwing open the gates to chaos and wailing desolation upon San City Utakus (Hans' Cesarm and Glück) before a skipping 4/4 rhythm with an arsenal of loquax and clatter – the most prevalent sound in the mix could be a lurching upon the waves of a suspension bridge, as it bents on severing all routes in and out. Steam vents hiss and the spaces between the beats are filled with blocks of leftover perception – it's more like four-wheeling than four-to-the-floor.

## OCTET

### HEY BONUS EP

DIAMONDRAXX DMR002 12"

When is a duo an octet? When it's Frenchmen Benjamin Moreno and François Goyet, who record together as Octet. Or is it? bad joke still, there must be some kind of algebra at work because the two playing at eight end up sounding like a remixed version of the Fab Four circa Magical Mystery Tour. Over trilling hi-hatpops and sweeping strings, a singer does the best McCartney impersonation. But for a pastiche, it's awfully scrabbled – plops and glitzes and millisecond edits mischievously corrupt the tune's easy, psychadelic glide. Transformer Di Roboter turns in a remix that's almost indistinguishable from the original, but it's Koker's mix that shines, laying down a dirty checkered rhythm before piling on distorted handpops and chunky choirs, carved from hi-hatpops and guitar. The vocal, cut and remixed in the original to sound like a casket experiment, are sliced into even smaller bits.

## REX THE DOG

### PROTOTYPE

KOMPAKT KOMPAKT012 12"

The cover art looks a little like Kid Kroc's cartoon goif but don't let that fool you into thinking that Germany's Kompaqt has finally gone Hip-Hop. Rex The Dog falls squarely within its gloss, gleaming techno camp. Actually, save for Justice Koehnlein's "2 After 909", this may be as close to electro as Kompaqt has got. The title track is an aggregated monster of one-two punching drums and Andie sponges opening into an enormous, flanged reverb that Faderpioneer would die for. "We Live In Daddy's Car" battles an uneven percussive figure with whirling car alarms and trouncing, cut-up vocal stabs before indulging again in fuzzed out dubs and leaning keyboard lines.

## KAT

### AWAY EP

KATU! KATU!012 12"

One of the best records yet to come out on the awaiti Parisian label Katu!, the Away EP is the debut release from French producer Sket. Only one of its five tracks, "U There", resembles the work of his labelmates Ark and Klikker but it lands him squarely in the Parisian cut-up camp thanks to thudding kick drums, simple sample stutters, and vocoos that agog across the track,

overturning cafe tables in their wake. But the record's other four cuts show a deeper, less hyperactive side to Sket. On "Rum like Saw", layers of aqueous bubs and pearl-neckled fizx give the track a 10-mo, underwater feel. "Too Much Thinking", which wraps dubby flanged keyboards around a stoned female vocal, is even more laid-back. And by the time you sink into "Lie Of", which crosses Chan Reatou's glancing chwds with Two Lone Swordsmen's atmospheres, you're breathing salt water.

## SUPER COLLIDER

### RADIATIONS ON THE RISE

RISE ROBOTS RISE RVERSE 12"

## BIG C

### WHY-HAT'S THE SIP

MOSCOUTU 001 12"

Two years after the release of Super\_Collider's Raw Dogs, Jamie Lidell and Creteon Vigel give their gospel duds "Radiations On The Rise" the reina treatment. Wagon Christ's reworking thins out the mark and reworks the wools, turning the tune into a liltin ballad over a lazy breakbeat and subtle strings, while Meteorites rework the wools in their own loundmouthed style over messy cat-calls. Super\_Collider touring group The Colliders also turn in a live version that's heavy on the stiegholls and dead bass. But it's hard to beat the grrrr, inverted funk of the original (also included here).

Staying back to his Techno roots, Vigel celebrates ten years of recorded work with Big C, a collaboration with Dave Torda and Meteories. "What's The SPP?" is a mousie, meeped-out Techno beat built from pounding, almost industrial drums and a relentless, chuffing wall of bass. The need to retain, "How can I get / How can I save", is growled with amphetamine determination. Si Begg and Vigel's version channel the original's energy and turn down the bombast a half notch, but only like A Tim actually reinvents the track, turning it into a mewl, off-kilter mix that teases inspiration from Wiley's hollowed out Eskobat studies, all bleep, crackle and thud.

## KARL ZEISS

### CURRENCY

RED ANTENNA RA12E 12"

New York's Red Antenna is one of the few North American labels to tap in to the teutonic steen of minimal Techno. Still, despite the crystalline ring of project alias Karl Zeiss – the duo of brothers Tee and Dan – Currency views the world through a lens that's been irreparably gunked up, and Zeiss's sound does as much from the dirty urban grid of downtown New York as it does the deskwork mechanics of Berlin. "Dirty Old Lady" sets a chappy-fau-fau-augiego in opposition to a woodstock stra. "Marka Tanx" – with a hagg, flanged baseline, basso out a sluggish electro pierce flecked with backwards hi-hats and ghooley little whippoorwill ches "Drama" is a nimbly, almost Throes-oriented shredder, with open hi-hats wheeling like knife-rotted blades, and "Ain't" rounds out the cut-on-quiet with a chunky, grrrry lo-fi House chug. □

# Dub

Reviewed by Steve Barker

## ACKIE/CHESSE ROOTS

CALL ME RAMBO/RAMBO GUN SALUTE

BASIC REPLAY/HEAVYWEIGHT DUB/MONO CD

The whining retreads feeding up into this dangerous UK djo-dancehall were loosed in 1986, a few years or so before the drum 'n' bass boys claimed as their own the samples from the soundtrack of *Apocalypse Now*. This was originally released on the Heavyweight label (an offshoot of the Wood Green and Tottenham areas of North London), featuring Chester Roots at the controls and his nephew Ackie at the microphone. The adoption here of Sly Stallone's Rambo character as inspiration was always bound to be low on the PC scale in the ever so strict mid-80s.

This is the second cut from Basic Channel's reggae reacquaintance squad, and it's as rough-and-tumble as they come, with a "Don't push me" vocal loop and a rhythm where drums and bass are barely distinguishable, so let's add dirty booms the sound. Time to reintroduce the expression "totally mad".

## CHARLEY 'ESKIMO' FOX

NATTORIOUS: ALTER RHYTHM

ON-U SOUND/OMU002 CD

Shutting between London and Jamaica, the debut album from veteran UK reggae keyboardist Charley 'Eskimo' Fox has been 20 years in the making. Best known as one of the original members of the On-U collective from the early 80s, he was also a contributor to the sound of *Concrete Rebel*, New Age Steppers and the original line-ups of both Brian Head Charge and Mark Stewart's Mafia. For switches between a sweet tenor and a near falsetto reminiscent of Junior Murvin or Congoriono Cedric Myton, while Step Up! Asif McDonald shares harmony duties with Astoria Roy.

The urgent opener "Changes" is among the highlights, along with the vintage, wuh-wuh drenched instrumental "Nadine Zulu" and "Natty Farmyard", which borrows its title from Fela's Studio One single.

## I ROY/GLENN BROWN/

CHOSEN FEW

TOUGHER THAN TOUGH/DO YOUR THING VERSIONS

FLASH/FASHION 10"

Here are four versions to Isaac Hayes soul-discoeller crusher from the Federal and Harry J studios. The Chosen Few's take was featured on the excellent Funk Kingston, Trojan's recent collection of ragga funk reverb, and that vocal groove is stretched out by the dub. The reggae flip, DJ I Roy professes his inevitable nod-in-skipping banter with "This little girl move much than a come/so whether you wear dasa or dasa/this is rough than tough".

There follows a shrutting eyeball out with Glenn Brown's melodic piping the melody over a siren brass chorus and descending with wobs. There probably aren't many of these Fresh 10" issues around, so you'd well advised to search this out sooner rather than later.

## MIGHTY DIAMONDS

### GO SEEK YOUR RIGHTS

FRONTLINE FL2002 CD

Other Jamaican vocal groups may rightfully lay claim to titles like with street cred – Abyssinians as 'most righteous', Culture as 'most militant', and so on – but The Diamonds surely delivered the sweetest, most heartstringing harmonies of all.

This compilation captures them at their heights in the mid-70s with the majority of material produced by the Hookems at Channel One and under the patronage of Richard Branson's blossoming Virgin reggae label. Frontline is the UK. The Right Time album title track plus 'I Need A Roof' and 'Have Mercy' surpass anything produced at the time in Detroit or Philadelphia. Catch other titles cut in the series from U Roy, Culture and Tappa Zukie.

## MUTANT HI-FI

### ATTACK OF THE SOFT MUTANT

HI-FI

ROUND BOY 980117

## SHARA NELSON

NOBODY ELSE/VERSION

ROUND BOY 980119

Possibly the last couple of releases on the On-U subsidiary, as another chapter has dimmed ownership of the Sound Bay name in perpetuity. Shara Nelson's first venture into recording was for Sherwood in 1982, with an early street epal rub, 'Running At Your Heart', on another shordified imprint, the Mobutu Entertainment Plate series, before she went on to sing with Massive Attack.

This new track takes her back to home ground on a scudding lowkey number with Shara in seafoul jealous lover mood. Mutant Hi-Fi is On-U studio engineer and programmer Nick Copeland, shaping up with what can only be described as debased old skool. What a pleasure it is to find a tune that so fits the category.

## PRINCE BUSTER

### THE MUSIC DUBWISE

PRINCE BUSTER M874P

Originally released in 1973, the legendary Buster dub set makes a welcome reapparance in a vinyl version featuring the original cover with a slim Big Youth, before the red, gold and green indoor implants, in instant pose in front of the Orange Steel Record logo. On the back, to the left of the legend "raw, pure, unrefined", is the crowned Buster alongside a rapt depicting Muia Lanza, Pst Boone, Tom Jones and Englebert Humperdinck.

As for the music, the lack of credits for either production or performance leave the listener somewhat in the dark. Still this is high quality stuff, reminiscent of Impact All-Stars or Lloyd Brevett's production of The Skatalites mixed by King Tubby. Total submission is achieved within the opening three tracks, "Sway Low" is a dub of Big Youth's "Revolution Rock" from the Ch. 45 album, also just assessed, "Sata A Masa Gana" is a club of Buster's take on The Abyssinians' classic, and "Jaw Hua" dabs "Science" by Prince Senor (aka Pablo Black), which is in turn his cut of Augustus Pablo's

"Java". Fans of flutes in dub should listen out for the way they flutter between drums and bass in strangely mournful mauls of seduction.

## ROB SMITH

### UP ON THE DOWNS

GRAND CENTRAL GC123 CDLP

If you've ever needed that the major music corporations' A&R departments were staffed largely by dimwits, it would be their inability to harness the talents of Rob Smith. Here, he once again demonstrates that his creativity cannot be bound by a single genre and that the application of a strict drum 'n' bass regime is at the heart of great dance music.

This is the second cut from his own same after years of outings under the Smith & Mighty and More Rockers banners, and although the sound can be tossed right back to his old time Bristol days, the production is both sparkling and deep, with a mix of vocals and tease from Katz, Gladian, Haze Jayne and Alice Penney. But ultimately the set is really defined by the instrumental versions "Rock Dope Stupid", "Bu Ruh" and "Reverie" – can that really be a Joy Division guitar sample in there?

## VARIOUS

JAH LOVE ROCKERS:  
REVOLUTIONARY SOUNDS  
FROM THE ROCKERS AND  
STEPPERS ERA 1975-1980

TROJAN TDD0145 2XCD

The reggae collecting brotherhood (I know of no others involved) may teach about Tiga's selectness, business ethics or strategy, but it's undeniable that many of the compilations company are marketing certain tunes to die for, the original versions of which could cost twice the price or more of the reissue sets.

Predictions are sold here between Observer, Bunny Lee and Tappa Zukie, and it's Observer who would come out top if this were a race, winning by virtue of the awesome "Sata" version from the aforementioned Leroy Smart "Jah Is My Light", followed on by the dissonant version "Wicked Ent. Det.", with the mighty I Roy hitting the heights with a lolly righteous roar punctuated by exhortations of importance. Then there's the ultra-heavy "Surfarrior", one of the most depressing reggae tunes ever cut and by now reaching stony anthropological status.

## VARIOUS

ROCKA SHACKA VOL. 7:  
JAMAICA UNDERGROUND  
DOWNBEAT SELECTION

DRUM & BASS UPCH1100A CD

Another Studio One selection, this time from a Japanese series of which around ten titles have appeared to date, many of them covering Prince Buster's output. Japanese collectors have long been notorious for their voracious mining of the sash (and letterbox reggae) vaults. It was always going to be a matter of time before the high-end soul/R&B blues based P-Five label was immed by an imprint with a Jamaican focus. The 15 tracks on this Drunken compendium set transgress the borders of

superfunk with a bunch of outrageously skanking tunes which otherwise would never have seen the light of day. Witness The Rhythm Rebels' "I'm Torn" featuring either Ernest Ranglin or his frightening come on chunky picking, The Sound Dimension's "Lo Amb", whereas a jolikety honking sax meets plangent wah wahs, and "What That", the Nitroo negot from nowhere.

All this is sumptuously balanced by Dennis Alcapone's DJ take on "Aquaman" from the happy musical hair and a version of George Harries' biggest solo hit, here titled "My Sweet Organ". Miss this at your peril.

## VARIOUS

### STUDIO ONE SKA

SOUL JAZZ SR006 CDLP

Soul Jazz continue their rampage through the megastores with this new selection in its exemplary genre-based Studio One series. Although for many reggae fans ska has always been 'there', it looks like a resurgence may be on the way, with the recent support from Werners for the great Jason You recordings, a forthcoming Gaz Mayall selection from Trojan and the dawning from Japan's Island-supported Drum & Bass label.

The clarion barnoon piano of Jackie Mittoo leads on "El Bang Bang", also available with Tammy McCrabb's "Sampson" on the previous 10" vinyl release. Although there are a clutch of peerless ska's from The Skatalites and their individual members, it's the ska versions of tunes better known in their reggae versions that provide the pull – Ken Boothe and Stranger Cole's "Antibis", The Wailers "Put It On" and, most of all, the truly legendary Joe Higgs with "Song My Enemies Sing". When will some enterprising label somewhere release his *Life Of Contradiction* album?

## WACKIE'S ALLSTARS

### CREATION DUB

CITY LINE W001 CDLP

Since its original release in 1977, Creation Dub has been on the most wanted list among reggae collectors, perhaps more on account of its scarcity value than its quality. But after a slow start the album really picks up when "East Africa Dub" uses Ken Boothe's classic "Say You" for inspiration. The record inaugurated Wackie's fruitful London connection and the repeated pressings carried a nostalgic distribution credit for the long gone Mansons Tunes shop, run by label champion Ray Cheddie. The core musicians here are Allah, regular arranger supreme Cleve Hunt and Jerry Harris (aka "Hitter" on the original sleeve) and the funktest of *Bulldozers*' session drummers, Joe Scotty.

Included are dubs of rhythms voiced for Wackie's by The Chosen Brothers, Joe Akumite and KC White, alongside versions of Monica Andry's "Mummy Blue", Sir Kinkaid's soul classic "I Want to Get Next To You" and, best of all, Sel Wheeler's toms version on the rhythm of the Harry Music classic "Leaving Rome". □

# Electronica

Reviewed by Ken Hollings

## H AMZQUITA

### MULTI

STATIC STAGGE CD

Although recorded in his hometown of Ensenada and mixed in Fernando Corrales' Plasma studio in Tijuana, Hugo Andrade's minimalist measures breathe the air of Cologne, Berlin, Vienna and Seattle with easy assurance. From the tranquil forward thrust of "Quita" and "Playback" to the delayed momentum of "Xan-medium" and the deft suspended structures of "Tape-theory", Multi displays an intimate awareness of techno's dismantling into cooler, subtler forms. If Ambitrix seems a little hesitant at times about moving outside such knowledge, there's still plenty here, especially in the nothering dub of "Teleport", to suggest that any sub-genre releases might be well worth tracking down.

## DANIEL BIRO & ROB PALMER THE LONG JOURNEY HOME

BARBERSHOP 006000 CD

Composer, musician and founder of the Saguaro label, dedicated to releasing contemporary experimental and avant-garde music, Daniel Biro has a distinct passion for the Fender Rhodes electric piano, which can be heard swiving, stabbing and shimmering with considerable subtlety throughout this sequence of six hexagonal compositions. The results of a single recording session with guitarist Rob Palmer in which both musicians drew upon a wide range of loops and effects, each entitled piece projects a deep sense of introspective warmth. Biro's liner notes point out, the concept of 'home' being expanded here is one of released familiarity rather than any strict domestic location. So subline a destination is wherever you happen to find it.

## CASINO VERSUS JAPAN/

### FRESCHA

### SPLIT EP

WORLDBEAT WB0003 CD

This is one pairing which makes increasing sense the more you look at it. Milwaukee's Erik Kowalek continues to chart characteristically melodicous sonic terrain as Casino Versus Japan, while San Francisco duo Nels Clineberg and Michael McGaughy keep themselves squarely on Frescha's quirky encrypted food food, to keep things simple. Casino Versus Japan alternates your compositions with Frescha's three, stacking up melodic lines against twisted beats, mournful ascensions against skewed contractions. Halfway through this exchange, however, strange similarities start to emerge and only the fascinatting can finally be trusted as who actually recorded what. However, it's the differences that make the most sense in the end.

## HOLGER CZUKAY

### THE NEW MILLENNIUM

FUNUNIVERSITY 0004 CD

This release, featuring three tracks lifted from the most recent album by one of Cologne's finest, and then fashioned by different hands is given expansive international breadth through an adept choice of the studio talents involved. Tem-

Thaemitz endows "La Première" with a troubled minimalist gloss that amply sustains interest throughout its brooding 13 minute duration. On "Metropolis" Hans Niewald gets close to the layered and subtle intricacies of Crayola's original, while "EchoGin", remixed by Frank Morris and Mario Doengi, has an implausible discofunk drive to it. But "new millennium" Davies, where you been the last four years?

## JASON FORREST/ DONNA SUMMER THE UNRELENTING SONGS OF THE 1979 POST-DISCO CRASH

SONGS 001000 CD

Jason Forrest: he should be made plain, never sang in the original German stage production of Hair. His opinions on gay people are entirely his own. He's changed his name to Jason Forrest. Dennis Summer simply because the bassoon is such a major instrument in his life. Following on from last year's This Needs To Be Your Style, Forrest shuns and does his way through a complex recorded archive of events and singularities with magnificent inventiveness. "An Event" is a penitent study of a helter-skelter passing, set to delicately luminous guitars. "Big Otagocean Sound Club" is for everyone who loathes Elton John but still can't help loving "Bennie And The Jets"; and "10 Amazing Years" could be Royal Tax attempting to sell off an instrumental stadium rock anthems. He's even smart enough to refer to such highly charged cutups as "songs". The guy's a straight up genius.

## GORK FISHING FOR SNIRKS

PLANET 0006 PH10008 CD

Having put in some time working with the likes of Italian Grand Magus of Techno Leo Young and releasing tracks on such labels as Ninja Tune and Timmy Trunk, Norway's Knut Snork makes his solo debut with the truly playful audacious project. Occupying the middle ground between early Orbital (minus the Harvill brothers' underlying sense of disillusion) and mid-period Orb, minus Dr Portman's obvious pleasure in desecration, Fishing For Snarks has the simple dreamy appeal of a children's story. Beats and sequencers keep up the steady drift, getting downright sinfully on "The Three Headed Nod: Nodder For The Snug", while structures and effects maintain gaucho poise throughout, particularly on the subsequent "A Visit From A Gobbler". Pecked with cartoons, secret access codes and sound waves, Fishing For Snarks ought to give you plenty to do until the summer finally comes.

## HALOBLACK THROB

ARMALYTE INDUSTRIES/THESICKICITY MICRO 03

Not so much a throb as a dull acho, the latest offering from former Polarity Project keyboard tech and sound designer Bryan Black paints cheeriness with a broad and sloppy brush. From the cooing inflections, supine adolescent questioning and maladroit thudding of "Why?" through to the soggy baseline on the closing "Drugbeat", this is one long, unfecked

exercise in gloom and despondency. KMFDM vocalist Raymond Watts tries to inject a little spirit into "Punch The Deck", but the material deflates even firmer. "No sleep, Can't sleep, I'm fat of apathy", he growls halfheartedly over talky sheet metal guitars. "I'm sinking. What are you thinking?" Sure you really want to know?

## HEARTS OF DARKNESSES

### MUSIC FOR DRUNK DRIVING

ASPHODELUS/SCHEMATIC 004 CD

Not that there's anything wrong with getting a step on, you understand. Enraged to the point of anger, tickled by the verge of tears, Franklin Musrra's first emission, brought to you in association with San Francisco's elite Asphalt label, piles 24 gibbering breakneck tracks into a furious spooling of 37 minutes and has it all in the time of the process. Faves include the 47 second opus of that is "White", the nosebleed delirious yammering of "Ice Guitar", and the damaged glam rock pounding on "Cut Off", a two minute epic. Sometimes you've just got to dare to be different.

## LAPSED TWILIGHT

AD NOISEM ADN004 CD

Get beyond the tautly generic minimalist packaging and the fact that all 14 tracks, including the Displaer remix by Michael Morton, are presented without titles and therein the promise of some genuine originality to be found on Jason M Stevens' first release under the lauded handle: ocean beats, random monotonous jingles and elegantly repeated melodies that exist as little more than cell signs are shuffled convincingly into structures of remarkable subtlety and strength. Walking alone out of Salt Lake City, Stevens has thrown open the sensitive space that exists between the tickle and the structured beat and made a quiet success of navigating the difference.

## MODUL

### ISOL

MASTER-NOTON/MASTER-POST 006 CD

Usually to be found recording for Miles Platouw, Fonsi Inc or his own Minimix label, Dublin's Dermot Connelly has made an astute contribution to Raster-Noton's pop minimalism project under the guise of Modul. The logic behind Isol gradually emerges over the duration of its six interrelated compositions. Driven by the gently high-pitched concatenation of "Clear", the three constituent parts of "Sift" and the two that make up "Run", present the transitions from large inflexible processes down to the smaller, more fluid ones with remarkable conciseness. The seeming accumulation of events that occurs with "Run", organised around the voice of Nina Hynes, shows particular skill and restraint.

## MOKIRA

### ALBUM

TYPE TYPE002 CD

After some highly successful exercises in micro-rhythmic reconstruction for Raster-Noton and Miles Platouw, Stockholm's Anders Tillander

dispenses with dips and outs altogether in favour of duration. Incidents become protracted into events. Sound is rendered as a dense series of pulsations that expand and contract according to a set of principles located just outside the normal boundaries of perceptual logic. Existing as one long piece, but broken down into seven unidentified tracks, Album is an intended exhalation from which a clipped array of vocal intonations is slowly permitted to emerge. This is inhuman beauty on a very human scale.

## MOTOR

KIRUNOKA/MUSIC KNUCKLE 001 CD

Investigating a grainer, more roughly milled selection of sounds than most producers of Russian electronica, Moscow's Motor combines shortwave crackles and snifly resonating tones over an infinite selection of seven short totes. Less ecstatic than some of his earlier releases on Holland's Acidic NL label, Motor's latest material is reflective without becoming subdued, withdrawn without being overly enigmatic. Hissing dispersed with beats on the opener "Extra Virgin", by the time he reaches "To Home", an extended meditation on how deeply muffled effects inevitably edge into one another, Motor has demonstrated how to create works of deeply felt emotional depth from the barest of means.

## RUMPISTOL

RUMPI RECORDINGS RUMPI001 CD

The cheerful opening amalgam of real and electronic barking on "Worgerflug" alone is indicative enough of the warm breeze blowing through this selection of eleven delicate creations from Denmark's Jesper Berents Christensen. His work breathes fresh and open air with admirable confidence, knowing when to pause and when to press on. The balance between floating melody and hushed ambience is carefully maintained. Despite the ponderous title, "Sdr. Fasenre. Kl. Ca." has a welcome lightness to it, while "Wingiboy" exudes a quietly pensive charm and "Hey Man?" is filled with gentle surprises. Guaranteed to take you from the latest of nights to the earliest of mornings with the least amount of fuss.

## XELA

TANGLED WOOL

TOWERTRAIL 001 CD

After 2003's remarkable For Frosty Mornings... on the Neo Quila label, John Xela is back with a luminous work of haunting delicacy. Based around and yet artlessly transcending the simple strumming of an acoustic guitar that lies at its heart, each track weaves and shines. "Smiles Are Bridges" is a sunnily chiming assertion. "Through Crimson Clouds" shimmers and glows with uninfected welcome. Listens closely, however, and you will hear another world beneath such evident simplicity, one of measured buoyancy and understated content. There are depths here that will take more than one listening to fathom, but it's a pleasure to get lost in them for even the shortest time. □



# Jazz & Improv

Reviewed by Julian Cowley

## TETUJI AKIYAMA & JOZEV VAN WISSEM PROLETARIAN DRIFT

BRUHAST 6404 CD

Tetuji Akiyama has performed duets with, among others, fellow guitars Taka Sugimoto, Osamu Yoshihiko and Mark Westall. The nylon string acoustic guitar he uses for the two improvisations on *Proletarian Drift* is tuned to match the Renaissance lute of Van Wissens, whose earlier deconstructive duets included a memorable encounter with Gary Lucas's *Nelson Steel*. As the word "shift" implies, the music is gradual and contemplative, unfolding like an unheated chess game, edging forward in a shared yet adaptable and accommodating language. Courteous appoggiatura, blata slurs and other pointers beyond the frame don't disrupt the Fideismus-like autonomy of their continually mutating, freely patterned flow.

## FRED ANDERSON & HAMID DRAKE BACK TOGETHER AGAIN THRELL JAZZ THRELL109 CD

Fred Anderson, proprietor of Chicago's Velvet Lounge, is a tenor bather with a purposeful tone, chipping away at thematic material in his solos, setting out earling trails of spears in the process. Drummer Hamid Drake, who featured in a quartet led by Anderson 25 years ago and has performed with him in various contexts since then, is a polyrhythmic phenomenon, whirling with awesome physical coordination around a steady central post prodded by the soprano. The rhythmic repertoire now at Drake's disposal is so extensive, so inventively combined that the music shifts into zones scarcely hinted at by Anderson's directness and persistence, as on "Lama Kiyoshi", an unexpected doctored chant galvanized by Drake's animated pulse.

## BEINS/MARWEDEL/VORFELD MISIKI

ROSSINI RECORDS CD

In the latter half of Misiki's "Schlaf" (Ends Ork Marwfeld's soprano cooing with the percussion and unspecified string instruments used by Burkhard Beins and Michael Vorfeld into a layered stack of their sound). Mostly, however, this 2001 Berlin recording is a serene, secretive, sparse and brittle. Marwfeld draws on extended techniques to baffle, purr and squeak through a taut, almost diagmatically matrix of points and lines marked out by Beins and Vorfeld. At times the horn, stripped down to its unnumbered soundmaking capabilities, is barely distinguishable from bowed metal, snarled strings, percussive popping. Tension arises from understatement and implication give a sense of connectedness to these eight improvisations. Their impact is cumulative, a sustained crescendo.

## BERGMAN/HASLAM/ HESSION THE MAHOUT

SLAM 518 CD

It's easy to admire pianist Boris Bergman's characteristic flint and fire, harder to enjoy it

unequivocally when experienced at length. His ambitious technique is astonishing, but its unyielding intensity can soon overheat and set. George Haslam has wisely if pragmatically condensed this set of three two-pieces with solo improvisations that cast welcome shadows into the gloom.

Haslam becomes tender remembering Mal Wieden, while Paul Hession's "The Warant" pays tribute to characterful actor Jack Palance. "The Dark", one of Bergman's two solos, is bathed in cosy snare, and "Streams", while not exactly explosive, is satisfyingly variegated. The title, ranging from animated to hushed, shows well Hession's capacity for tough yet flexible responses which add inflection to Bergman's volatility. Haslam's trapeza and baton-like saxophone, clearly paired for the occasion, cut fire through the musical mineral walls.

## BITTEN BY A MONKEY FRUITS FROM DISTANT LANDS

BLAM 011 CD

Some musical genres become far too easily ensnared in a loop of replication. Free improvising is naturally disposed to continuous invention. Monkey happens but frequently cementsals of personal experience and preference brought to a session help renew the music's terms and horizons. The quiet Bites By A Monkey display certain affinities with earlier groups such as Alchemists in their unusual instrumental mix, stylistic openness, montage logic and humour. Yet its fresh angularity derives from the blending of recorder and trumpet player Steve Myres, alto player Dylan Bates, Roland Bates on piano and Pat Thomas on electric keyboard. When allusions are overtly made – jazz, African music, East European folk, bell ringing, soundtracks – they carry not the dead weight of influence and obligation but the charge of a mass that's unmistakably alive and in its own moment. All that and a duck call too...

## THE JOEL FUTTERMAN & IKE LEVIN TRIO WITH KASH KILLION

LIVE AT THE NOE VALLEY  
MINISTRY, SAN FRANCISCO  
CHARLES LESTER MUSIC ML10205 CD

## JORDAN/FUTTERMAN/ FIELDER TRIO LIVE AT THE TAMPERE JAZZ HAPPENING 2000

CHARLES LESTER MUSIC CLM10004 CD

Joe Futterman's characteristic approach to piano playing might be summed up in the word *flexion*. Spikingly chords, fractured phrasing, pulverised themes, highly controlled yet usually kaleidoscopic, high voltage energy release. He also plays separate solo and Indian wobbles fast on both these releases, varying the menu.

The Californian expatriot from 2002 has like Levin on tenor sax and bass clarinet, Kash Killion on double bass, cello and sazeng and that instrumentation feeds an audible, if in practice limited, concern for spacing and cohesion. Futterman's sprightly pianistic eruptions precipitate hectic events. Levin's

responses are starkly secure and narrow; Killion, an experienced adventurer schooled in the 1970s with pianist Horace Tapscott, is agile and more daring.

Futterman is in full spate at the Finnish Tampera festival, where he's joined by a pair of estimable, unjustly neglected veterans. Tenorman Kidd Jordan's credits include work with Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor. His debt to Coltrane is palpable and acknowledged, yet Jordan himself is utterly there and burning ferociously, neither seconding nor second fiddle to Futterman. Alvin Fielder, who studied with Ed Blackwell and was a founder of Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, is an amazing and clarifying drummer, laying a coordinating grid across the wildlife. There's a genicetic quality to his self-possession, even as he's fully engaged with the action.

## HAMBURGER/PRATI/GUY CELEBRATION

AUDITORIUM AUS0103 CD

Walter Prati is probably best known for his improvising on live electronics in duet with Evan Parker's saxophone. He's also an accomplished cellist and Celebration finds him flanked by Mayo Hamburgo's resonant Banjoon violin and Barry Guy's double bass.

The music preserves a sense of the historical through these instruments, while registering the musicians' shared taste for collision with the unknown. A cover photo shows the strong trio examining scores, but their music, transcending easy distinctions between what's written and what's improvised, dues the vitality of spontaneous playing with compositional clarity and complexity of organisation. Their timosity is undiluted but it's a distillation of body and mind as well as technical mastery. String lines are layered and interlocked – no too are ideas, memories and feelings. The music moves in various senses.

## STEN SANDELL TRIO FLAT IRON

SOFA 814 CD

The second SoFa CD featuring this trio led by Swedish pianist Sten Sandell was recorded live at Umeå Jazz Festival in 2002. The set starts with a crackly jazz sarge, but Sandell's musical orientation is wide ranging – he's been deeply involved in more abstract forms of improvising and in the electroacoustic voice. He uses voice and electronics here to good effect. John Berthling and drummer Paul Nilsson-Law well beyond the conventional horizons of the piano trio.

More pervasively, his approach to the keyboard is to allow recognisable jazz figures to coexist, then to dissolve them into alternative structures with quite alert dynamics. Although Berthling and Nilsson-Law are younger musicians, both of them have considerable experience of working within and beyond idiomatic constraints. Still, it's Sandell who impressively negotiates density and pace, and steers the trio between cumulative phrasing and bolder encounters with sound.

## DAVE TUCKER WEST COAST PROJECT

TENDERLOIN  
PAK RECORDS CD

A regular member of the London Improvisers Orchestra, Dave Tucker took his electric guitar and electronics to California in 2001 and with assistance from amplified acoustic guitarist Ernesto Diaz-Infante found sympathetic and stimulating company. In the West Coast Project he's joined by cellist Daniella De Grotto, bassist Damon Smith and drummer Garth Powell, with subtle and inchoate real-time laptop computer processing from Scott R. Rooney. A group atmosphere finds room around Tucker's lightly wry phrasings and lingering sustained tones. Complicated mosaics and stretched out textures are separated and together on these dozen studio pieces and one live track, all executed with a degree of tact and attention to fine detail.

## ATSUYA YOSHIDA & SATOKO FUJI

TZACK 12947 CD

An inspired musical coupling in Tokyo of Tatsuya Yoshida, drummer with the Rinsu, and pianist and big band leader Sora Fuji has resulted in the compelling *Ensis*. Each of its 13 compositions depicts dovetails into the next, orally enlivened by means of recurrent motifs, gestures and progressions. Compositional credits are shared evenly, and in performance the pair sustain a remarkable balance, forces in modest tension. Rhythmic passages are spiced with delicate intonations. Precision of execution is a watershed throughout – the duo achieve a degree of synchronisation that at times seems preternatural. Unlike the common run of instrumental dialogues, which overlap (sometimes insistently) and leave loose ends, the drums and piano on *Ensis* are linked, one within the other, mettulously polished, crystalline and glistering.

## INGAR ZACH & IVAR GRYDELAND YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN ME

SOFA 815 CD

Percussionist Zach and guitarist Grydeland founded the excellent SoFa label in 2000. Their second duo release presents a fascinating pair of improvisations caught last year in Geneva and Oslo. Grydeland characteristically rings harmonics and paces bright, steadily rattling figures on metal stings acoustic guitar. Infrequently Zach adds decisive beats, generating cymbal shimmer or low thuds, eliciting a shunt from his Indian snare box or drawing brilliant chimes from small bells. Controlled feedback from Grydeland's electric guitar plays its part in what seems to be a conscious process of redefining the performance space, modifying its feel or adding significant duration while the focal point, centre stage, may be left suggestively vacant. On CD these improvisations, five months apart in different cities, both convey an element of auditory art design that doesn't just frame but actively constitutes the music. □

# Modern Composition

Reviewed by Philip Clark

## GEORGE ANTHEIL

### THE LOST SONATAS

WERGO 98812 CD

American composer George Antheil (1900-59) was dubbed the "bad boy of music" (the title of his autobiography) for scenes like *Ballet Mécanique*, which mocked symphony pretenders and snobs with an ensemble of 16 player pianos.

Antheil anticipated Cage's idea that art shouldn't be divorced from reality and he was radicalised by his experience of Charles Ives, Henry Cowell and Edgard Varèse. *Planar Joy Livingston* has reconstructed Antheil's piano sonatas from his apparently chaotic archive, and the pieces make for a tumultuous, mostly listenable *The Sonata Savage and Woman Sonata* (both 1923) are an intriguing melting of European influences and Yankee mirth. *Bambini* (not an ensemble by virtue of clusters), as Antheil does between his compositional ideas, giving the music a freshly bashed improvisatory quality. These later sonatas, written in the 1950s in response to Prokofiev's trilogy of wartime sonatas, are more sober, but show a composer at the height of his powers.

## LEONARD BERNSTEIN

### JUBILEE GAMES

XXCD 20019 CD

He may have composed *West Side Story*, but Bernstein was assembling innovative gospelers scores years before the tempest arrived. Today these pieces retain a visionary quality that speaks more urgently to us than modish contemporary offerings by Eliot Cramer or Jacob Druckman. Bernstein's *Concerto For Orchestra* (justified *Jubilee Games*) was completed in 1980. It has an experimental髓ance with reflections on his Jewish faith. The first movement, "Fee Style Events", explores the significance of the number seven in Jewish theology and requires players to collide improvisation against composed material, as earlier sections of the work are recorded in real time and bounced back at them. The second section is a taut set of variations while the third movement, "Dances Dances", is the sort of hotwritten jazz at which Bernstein excelled.

## GEORGE CRUMB

### BLACK ANGELS

BRIDGE 90261 CD

*Black Angels* (1970) was George Crumb's response to the Vietnam War. Scored for amplified string quartet, the players bounce quotations from the *Des Iwo Jima* and Schubert off and walls of white noise 30 years on, Crumb's musical theatre still seems relevant. In concert, performers are masked and strike percussion instruments while producing weeping glassware on their strings. The disc is completed by the churning *Up the Hills* (2002), which sounds Appalachian folk songs. The singer is Crumb's daughter Ann, more famous for her roles in musicals by Andrew Lloyd Webber. We can assume this is the best music she's ever sung.

## MORTON FELDMAN

### PALAIAS DE MARI

KAROS 9490232 CD

Although this is a thoughtful interpretation, we've about reached saturation point with recordings of

Feldman's vindictive piano work *Palais De Mari* (1986). More useful is pianist Sieghard Moeller's discovery of an as yet unpublished piece, *Three Dances*, which, although unsitled, sounds like the miniatures as accompaniment for choreographers, and the third piece requires performers to bridge the gap between music and the everyday by accompanying themselves on a drum and drinking glass. The result sounds like Feldman filtered through a Cagean sensibility. Moeller completes the disc with steady and intimately accented performances of Feldman's seminal *Native Peaces* (1951) and *Intermissions* (1950-53).

## GEORG FRIEDRICH HAAS

### IN VAIN

KAROS 94902322 CD

Austrian composer Georg Friedrich Haas writes that "Mozart's music has no tradition... You need to justify the use of tones from outside the tempered system". *In Vain* (2000) is a noisy hour long study for large ensemble that explores the possibilities of different tuning systems. Beginning in normal Western tempered intonation, the music becomes "distracted" as Haas stretches intervals away from equal temperament, pushing them towards natural harmonic spectra. He has a subtle ear – woodwind families are alive with detail, and his big ensemble tutti passages are sonorously orchestrated for maximum impact. French horn take centre stage at the halfway mark and Haas draws an intriguing line between the Romantic tradition of horn writing in Schumann and Bruckner, and György Ligeti's experiments in non-tempered horn spectra. Haas's instructions for stage lighting, which sometimes leave the players plunged into darkness and unable to follow the conductor, are impossible to appreciate on disc. Nonetheless, the eloquence of his composition speaks for itself.

## MAURICIO KAGEL

### TANTZ-SCHUL

WINTER & WINTER 900010 CD

Winter & Winter's *Tantz-Schul* cycle unfolds on a larger canvas than before, with this 80 minute orchestral score inspired by a 1736 treatise by Dionysos Kirchner, New And Curious Theatrical School Of Dancing. As Kagel explains, the Venetian dancermaster illustrated 70 different ballet scenarios, each with its own commentary and notated melodic. However, each melody comes with a network of mistakes in its musical notation, and Kagel has denied systems of harmony and counterpoint to incorporate these errors into a definition of stylized impurity and of wrong being right. The music is giddy and often surprisingly lush, with reminders of Stravinsky and Debussy. Not one of Kagel's most subversive or technically innovative scores, but it's a typically entertaining and ingenious piece.

## PIERRE LANGEVIN &

### PIERRE TANGUAY

### LA BOULEZIAILLE

AMBiances MAGNETIQUES AM14 CD

Don't be misled by the 'Pierre' and the 'Boulez' references here – this disc has nothing to do

with the French avant garde. Langevin and Tanguay are French Canadians with a background in jazz and modern composition, and Tanguay describes this blend of traditional and invented instruments as aiming "at understanding the past to better our understanding of the future". The music often sounds like "invented" folk, as Langevin's percussive solo playing is underscored by the noise Tanguay generates from percussion, toy instruments and power tools. A quirky and very personal vision.

## MISATO MOCHIZUKI

### SI BLEU, SI CALME

KAROS 94902409 CD

Misato Mochizuki is a distinctive Japanese composer who has managed to add spin in her imagination, the whispering harmonics of Oriental folk music with equivalent sounds developed as "eaten-in" instrumental techniques in the music of central European figures like Holger Lachernack and Beat Ferrer. She is at her best painting bold orchestral colours with massed ensembles. *La Chambre Clave* (1998) develops ensembles from a repetitive violin line into a second section dominated by fluty bassoon writing and a jazz rhythm section, while *Si Bleu, Si Calme* (1997) starts with an orchestral crash and ends with Lachernack-style textual rumbling *Intermezzi* (1998) and *There Is (including Me)* (1996), both for smaller chamber groups, are expertly pointed but Mochizuki doesn't work so well on a less grand scale.

## VLADISLAV SHOOT

### HIGH CROSS SYMPHONY

8002 800001 CD

## VICTOR KISSINE

### CHAMBER MUSIC

SOUL 500229 CD

Vladislav Shoot and Victor Kissine are the first subjects of the new German label devoted to under-documented Russian modernism. Shoot, now resident in Düsseldorf, is perhaps the most audibly link back to the tradition of Shostakovich and Schnittke. His *High Cross Symphony* is a four movement assemblage of buoyantly juxtaposed Romantic gestures and sensuously hamfisted melodies that go nowhere in particular, propped up against gaudy percussive writing. In comparison, Victor Kissine's music might seem stolid but is nonetheless tantalising. His *Collo Sonate Portata* for keyboard instruments and strings, *Madrigal* for five violins and two for violin, cello and piano all evoke dry musical details over long durations which ordinarily would feel out of scale.

## DAVID DEL TREDICI

### VINTAGE ALICE

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 447593 CD

*Vintage Alice* is a setting of the Mad Hatter's tea party from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. In fact everything David Del Tredici has written since the early 80s has either been inspired by Carroll or by James Joyce. As Julian Assange comments in his sleeve notes, they are "both writers whose

sense of fantasy bordering on unreality and delight in linguistic play connect naturally with Del Tredici's own wonderfully exuberant imagination". *Vintage Alice* begins with soprano Lucy Shelton narrating Carroll's text with an accordion wheezing underneath, only for the orchestra to crash in with a parody of "God Save The Queen". Del Tredici bases the entire work on this and also "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star", upending their melodies, combining and harmonising them in a relentless display of creative wove and elaborate orchestral detail. The disc opens with the early Joyce *Leopold Bloom* and *Syzygy*, and Del Tredici joins Shelton at the piano for some further Joyce settings.

## ROBIN WALKER

### 1 THIRST

RIVERSIDE RYCD 100 CD

York born Robin Walker now lives on the edge of the Saddleworth moors and has developed a distinctively English compositional language, with references to Michael Tippett, Robert Simpson and Harrison Birtwistle, but one that avoids cloying pastoralism. The opening ensemble piece *Darkly Still* (1982) was inspired by Walker's experience of the Hindu dance of Bharatnatyam during a trip to India, and is a work of shaggy gestures and instrumental extremes. *Dances With Ghoals And Chevrons* (1986) for solo organ is tiddie and refreshingly 'uncouth', while two pieces for recorder and piano take this unimely combination into something playful and witty. The disc takes us from Walker's 1994 song quartet *1 Thirst*, which wittily reimagines melody around points from the harmonic series. An enthralling disc from a composer from whom we should hear more often.

## BERND ALIOS ZIMMERMANN

### CHAMBER MUSIC

ALBRECHT 062 CD

Violinist Peter Sheppard Skewes, pianist Ian Pace and cellist Friedrich Gaußevsky collaborate on a survey of chamber music by the enigmatic German composer Bernd Aljos Zimmermann, who died in 1970. Zimmermann overthrow the unyielding organisation of sonatas with what he described as a "plastic concept of time", developing a technique in which a multitude of borrowed sources were collaged and fused together. *Présence* (1961) is a characteristic Zimmermann. The violinist is cast as Don Quixote, the cellist as Molly Bloom and the pianist as Ute Ro. The composer creates an intriguingly incongruous present by jamming musical artifacts from the past. The bleak, boding *Intercessions* (1967) is a late masterpiece which shows how two apparently incompatible instruments, the cello and piano, manage to communicate. Epic and tense cello passages are violently raped by pacific explosions, a freight scenario vividly realised by Gaußevsky and Pace. This exceptional disc is completed by solo pieces for each instrument, ranging from the early *Capriccio* for solo piano to a set of cello studies completed just before Zimmermann's death. □

# Outer Limits

Reviewed by Jim Haynes

## BIOTA/MNEMONISTS

MUSIQUE ACTUELLE 1990

ANOMALOUS NOSES CD

Bots and The Mnemonists began out of the same pool of Canadian musicians and artists in 1979 as The Mnemonist Orchestra, which included Amy and Mark Derbyshire, Steve Scholte, Lucy Wilson and William Shaw, before splintering into a visual contingent including visual artist Heidi Eversley (Mnemonists) and a musical one (Bots). The recording from 1990 is a rare example of the group's live incarnation, which integrated video imagery with the musical products, thus necessitating the invention of both names.

Even though it was only recorded 14 years ago (in rehearsal and performance at the Mission de la Culture Francoise, Montreal), *Musique Actuelle* 1990 stands as an eccentric, geeky dataset ever compared to much older recordings from hamstrung Prog/Art ensembles like Thinking Plague, Faust or Magus. Bots/Mnemonists' intellectual strategies certainly have their charms, typically found during the simpler passages dominating the early parts of the record. Here, multiple horns subjected to a ring modulation and other electronic effects form impressionistic melodies that flutter off into the distance. After an emphatic burst of noise disrupts the atmosphere, purposefully darkly amorphous take over like a big band on a calculated stampede through numerous time signatures, expressiveness solos, and musical genres.

## BORIS

BORIS AT LAST – FEEDBACKER

DWYMLANK PAK102 CDLP

For several years now, this Japanese Doom Metal trio has been poised to make a majestic album of post-Sabbath riffage coupled with a savvy intellect that has earned them collaborations with Mewmow and Keiji Haino. Unfortunately, Boris have never quite realized their potential. To be fair, *Boris At Last* – Feedbacker is a pretty good amalgamation of the group's exemplary influences (je Sabbath, Melvins and Earth), where a sprawling blues progression stretches out over a full 45 minutes occasionally punctuated by an interplay guitar solo, it descends into feedback abstraction and a perfunctory return to their opening doom 'n' blues sheets. Given that the Boris catalogue is woefully expensive and very difficult to track down, their albums should give more bang for the buck, and the group continue to undermine expectations listeners hold out for them. Perhaps one of these days Boris will stop flogging around and finally produce that ass kicking record that surely lurks within them.

## DOKTOR KETTU

HIGH REVOLUTION

SUPER METTA NO NUMBER CD-R

I REALLY LIKE DIAMONDS

SUPER METTA NO NUMBER CD-R

If the moniker were true and not a pseudonym for some ragged Fins with unspoken connections to the hyper-Prog rock ensemble

Doktor, the Doktor must have skipped more than his fair share of classes in medical school while using his credentials to self-medicate quite heavily. Neither clarity nor surgical precision are what this boney cerebral – either, it's a thick, stodgy sound devoid of much more than muddled guitars churning behind an omnipotent wall of delay pedals.

When the drummer wakes up from a narcotized stupor to stumble across the drumkit, or one of the guitars synchronizes with the delay pedals, Doktor's heart must emerge as something of a low test Acid Mothers Temple with a similar anti-production to early Faustbooks. As a bony narrating agent, the Doktor's resonant droll mantran are effective enough, even if they're interchangeable with a previous batch of equally small CD-R productions which were published just a few months back.

## FURASKA

MANDRAKE

ECUPE ECD091 LP

Furaxo's outstanding debut recording, Mandrake has finally been resurrected from the Acid Mothers Temple in-house label, which originally published it as part of a highly collectable CD-R series two years ago. The work of Philadelphia tarryduq queen Tere Barre aka Furaxo tags upon a single historical thread that predates the sullied history of psychedelia and even the secret musical histories that can sleep within Americans. Instead of the blues based structures found in many of her stone+flax brothers, Furaxo draws on musical forms that could be common old for her: madrigals, tumbling, slow motion medieval liturgical chants and archetypal nursery rhymes which occasionally ooze an earthy sadness.

This musico-logical time travel could have been an exotic and complex experience, yet Mandrake is breathtakingly simple. Within three minute tracks such as "Rensack The Park" (dec) and "Cinemas", Burke effects a longing atmosphere with just guitar, voice and chord organ, the emotional resonance of which is quite dazzling.

## KEMIALLISET YSTÄVÄT

VARISEVIEN TANSSSI/

SILJUMIEN MARSSI

KOIVIT NOSTAUKU KIRKON LP

Kemialliiset Ystavat translates from their native Finnish tongue as Chemical Friends, which perfectly describes the loose band of individuals rounded up by singer/guitar Jan Alander to perform a severely damaged strain of primeval folk and probably to partake of various intoxicants. The drug addled messiness of Koivit's aural folk wanderings plays itself out as psychedelia in minature.

Each of their songs arises from repetitions of constantly out of tune acoustic instruments, creating a buzz of offharm dissonance which swirls throughout all of their recordings. They hardly reference any of the American explosives of minimal hippydom – rather, Kemialliiset

Ystavat offers a self-contained language, a warily ritualism, much closer in spirit to *Avant\*trans* or the obscure esoterica of The Sun City Girls.

## MURMER

THEY WERE DREAMING THEY WERE STONES

GROUND FAULT GFA03 CD

After a handful of tiny CD-R editions, Patrick McGlynn (aka Murmer) has graduated to a proper CD production for his latest excursion into spectrography, manipulated field recordings and the amplified minature of environmental sounds. As previously, McGlynn states the source material for each of his compositions (car seat massager, gas meter, the Brooklyn Bridge, Tibetan bellbird incense celebrations, train, etc), almost closing his listeners to take back these sounds out of within his looched samples, delay pedal feedback, and gaily reverbs.

He's at his best when the sources intertwine, rather than obfuscate on top of each other, as during the beautiful passage at the end of the album, where an angelic chorus hovers over averted diners that slowly reveal themselves to be distant car horns gleefully wailing in an avalanche of reverb.

MORNTHAM  
MEMOIRS OF FOUR  
DISCARDED OBJECTS

EDITION NO NUMBER CD

JOEL STERN &  
MICHAEL NORTHAM

WORMWOOD

GROUND FAULT GFA02 CD

At first, Utah born morntham's definition of himself as a "comparator of sound" seems gibberish. However, the further one delves into his impressive body of work, which centres on explorations of a place through focusing on its geological and physical characteristics, the more it makes sense. Morntham weaves down various field recordings and electroacoustic events, then reanimates the results, which seek to balance the organic and inorganic qualities of his original sources.

In his previous works, his "comparisons" are droning aggregates that reflect the physicality of the 60s minimalists. On these two records, morntham offers a slight but important shift in his work by focusing upon specificity, analogues textures and complex detail. Memoirs Of Four Discarded Objects shimmers with the resonance of his handhewn tree brush sculptures, whose densely packed thickets of sound eventually collapse into a glassine vibrissae extending towards infinity.

Crafted from a single late night session in London, Wormwood finds morntham collaborating with the electroacoustic improviser Joel Stern. Stern's prodigly for prepared guitar tricks with found objects, it's not surprising that a more intimate, if at times claustrophobic mood sets over these thoroughly abstracted scribblings and whirrings. Two exemplary pieces of adverb literating.

## COLIN POTTER &

PAUL BRADLEY

BEHIND YOUR VERY EYES

KOICR099 2XCD

JONATHAN COLECLOUGH/  
BASS COMMUNION/  
COLIN POTTER

SV/T

KOICR099 2XCD

Despite a prolific career in the British musical underground dating back to the late 70s, Colin Potter has remained a relatively obscure figure. Potter has been the only major partner with Steve Stapleton in Nurse With Wound during the past six or seven years and continues to engineer recordings for a handful of emergent dionescapic/minimalist talents. Princeton's Paul Bradley is one such artist, and the two have collaborated for a remarkably dynamic piece of isekthionism rampant with modic' central slashes that's ominously studded spot-activated evocative drones.

Early last year, Steve Wilson (of Porcupine Tree, No-Man, and recently Opeth) commissioned Potter and longtime collaborator Jonathan Coleclough to contribute a remix CD of his Bass Communion project. While the name implies the crusty Flint Dog elements of new culture, Wilson's Bass Communion harks back to the synthetic noise music of early Tangerine Dream, Eno and Cluster, thus making for a decent match with the Coleclough/Potter axis of dionatology. Upon the completion of that remix project, the three embarked on a massive two CD collection of cross-pollinators of each other's sounds.

This three way collaboration relies heavily upon naked synths shot towards deep space while encountering decompressed whispers, earthbound environmental recordings and even a post-Orb Ambient kickass pulse as a mere detour on the way towards infinity.

STEVE RODEN & JASON KAHN

STEVE RODEN & JASON KAHN

BROWNSKIN BROWN PLASTICS BROWNSKIN CD

For the Brownskin project, former Sheepfoot operator Frans De Waard commissions two or more sound artists to take up residence at the Edgewood Arts centre in The Netherlands, work individually for a week or so, and have the results published through Horns Plastics. This Steve Roden and Jason Kahn collaboration – Brember's self publication – is a match that was chosen from the onset. As incredibly astute listeners in the manufacturing of delicate sounds, Roden and Kahn have both been very successful in harnessing lower case sounds from electroacoustic and improvised source materials. Through their collaboration, they transform the sounds from minimal percussion, guitar, analogue synth and other acoustic objects into steady, quietly accumulating layers of samples. All these loops are quite lengthy and resist obvious rhythmic notation; their austere beauty emerging from a complex relationship between the tidal fluctuations of sustained bell tones, decelerating whistlings, and clapped digital lapses. □

# Print Run

New music books: devoured, dissected, dissed



Kill your lights: The Incredible String Band, late 1960s, from *An ISB Compendium*

## BEGLAD: AN INCREDIBLE STRING BAND COMPENDIUM

ADRIAN WHITAKER (EDITOR)

HELTER SKELTER PUBLISHING Pbk £15.99

BY ROB YOUNG

The Incredible String Band may have done themselves a lasting disservice the day Robin Williamson and Mike Heron gathered together under an ancient Scottish oak, along with a selection of guitars, male chimes, leaky kids and a dog called Lat, posing for what was to become the cover shot for their 1968 LP *The Hangmen's Beautiful Daughter*. What the photo consigned to posterity became the quintessential image of British hippy folkies: looky ragged gingers, aloof and driftin' from a world adrift with conflict from Nigeria to Vietnam. That image has hardly helped the visionary British music of the period between 1965-73, made by the likes of Joe Boyd's Witchseason Productions stable, John Renbourn, Shirley Collins, Kaledoiscope, Tines and a myriad others, in gaining a more respectful recognition.

It was, after all, an era of scintillating crossstalk between folk music, psychedelic rock, blues and jazz, where the music worked up in an Edinburgh folk club could find new currency among the freaks of hip London clubs like UFO, Marquee, audiences and critics engaged in the same battle for 'authenticity' that forced the word 'judas' out of some Luddite lips at bob Dylan's

famous Manchester show in 1966. Renewed interests in medievalism and Tolkein wed with the electrification of Fairport Convention, John Martyn, et al; travels to Morocco, Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent brought back exotic new instruments such as the zither, reed and rebab, which combined neatly with the Celtic pipes, drone and fife. And the hippy ethos of a whimsical disengagement with the world and its ways threw a generation of twentysomethings back on their own resources out there in the country.

Incredible String Band encompass all of these shifts, and still command a dedicated following, not only among those who were turned on and tanned in back in the late 60s, but also among a certain sector of early southerners practitioners (you can hear them on Waterson's *Cast Your Cod*, and even Bands Of Canada, another hemisphere inclined Scots diaf affilid to the ISB). With very little going writing about British folk – no Greil Marcus or Barney Hoskyns to serve the genre in the UK – it's left to hangman Websites and fanzines to keep the torch burning. *Beglad*, the zine edited by Adrian Whitaker, Andy Roberts and Raymond Greenaway since 1992, is the birth around which ISB fans have warmed their cockles, and this Compendium digests the best of 12 years.

From an era of phoney mystics and drug scumbled clowns, The ISB's part-theatric

curlicues of song ring with the authority of those who kept apart to listen to the voices within their own heads. The 30 or so contributors to this book were, and clearly remain deeply scored by their music, and several labour a little too earnestly to pass on the gospel. The entire book is sensibly compiled to tell ISB's tale, interspersed with critical digressions on each record. Arousing at first, it becomes slightly wearisome to witness former hippies or flowerpower dizzied schoolboys still tying themselves in knots over the meaning of certain couplets or even, like, who was the Hangmen's Beautiful Daughter?

You do get evocative thumbnail glimpses of other lives: Mary Stewart's touring hours outside Glasgow, where the likes of ISB stayed for a while and rehearsed their songs (a hoard of reel tapes were recently uncovered in the attic during a renovation). A short piece by John Quigley conducts us through the Edinburgh of the late 60s, pinpointing significant locations around the seat-blackered city alluded to in ISB lyrics. These follow multi-perspective accounts of the British folkie culture that has almost totally disappeared: ISB's immersion in Scientology and retreat in a Welsh college community of Penmynydd; the experimental troupe Stone Monkey, one-off gigs in the 70s folk circuit wildmenses. And, occasionally surprising voices pipe up: Rowan Williams, who today goes by the

handle Archbishop of Canterbury, provides a foreword, while comedian/actor Billy Connolly reminisces passion about his formative years as a pill-packing youth having his mind blown by ISB at Scottish folk nights. By the end, you almost feel you know Robin Williamson, Mike Heron and their various friends and collaborators, through the amount of contemporary sources unearthed, from interviews and reviews to the short fiction they used to provide as programme notes. However, the mystery of the disappeared member Ulky aka Christina 'Lionor' McKechnie remains unsolved.

As a fans' book, this is an inevitably partisan account. The tone usually assumes undying loyalty to ISB end, while going into details and analysis of each album and phase in the group's life, assumes a fair degree of familiarity with the characters in this drama. A certain 'folky' voice pervades, with writing-à-propos studies that could have been expanded in the edit (Stewart Godfrey's personal response to 'Hendraig's Song', from the 5000 Spicks *Or The Layers Of The Onion* LP is depleted by 'I know it's a sexist comment, but girls just seemed to love it!', and a couple of contributions supply too much information about their feelings for the group's female members). Without such intrusions, this would have been a more approachable chronicle of this group and their times. □

## STOMP AND SWERVE: AMERICAN MUSIC GETS HOT 1843-1924

DAVID WONDREICH  
CHICAGO REVIEW PRESS \$17.95

BY MARCUS BOON

New York journalist and cocktail guru David Wondrich's *Stomp And Swerve* offers a novel take on the enormous underworld of popular sound (lyng in the wake of jazz and the blues and other celebrated inuities) that sprung up in America at the Dend of the 18th century — when recorded sound was in its infancy. Using a strange combination of classical Latin sources and classic Steeplechase, former classical scholar and park bassist Wondrich argues for a continuity of 'hot' American music, recognisably manifesting as funk or rock 'n' roll or bar back, as 1843. Through years of painstaking archival research, he sets far evidence of that beat, taking an old regime 78s, wax cylinders of cakewalks, and 18th century sheet music to 'coo' songs. A very diabolical kind of think, though he would doubtless pour soon on the word (unless this blabber was a cocktail, in which case he'd pour rye whiskey on it). Wondrich

argues that funk, rock 'n' roll and other 'hot' music forms, emerged out of the clash between Celtic stomp and African swerve, as former African slaves and new Irish immigrants encountered each other in American cities after the Civil War. This clash — and its mutations and permutations, documented in chapters on minstrelsy, ragtime, jazz and blues — in turn becomes turf for a battle between Topworld (the white bourgeoisie) and Underworld (the multi-ethnic masses).

Wondrich's writing is a highly enthralling hybrid of classical historians like Edward Gibbon, the incoherence of PG Wodehouse, and the passionate declamation of Lester Bangs. He translates easily from the Latin to make a point about race in 19th century America, seen from the perspective of a Flapper girl. It's a brilliant sideways lunge at 19th and 20th century history, willing to argue that *The Original Dixieland Jazz Band's 1917 residency at Newbern's night club on Eighth Avenue and 56th Street* in NYC marked the beginning of the American century. Like other historians of the recently outmoded, he spends a lot of time with his face up against a glass so fogged up by

time that what lies behind it is anybody's guess. Unlike them, he's unwilling to go beyond the evidence, although in his heart he knows that Andri 3000 is there in 1900, mutating the cakewalk.

Wondrich's great gift is to rescue the early history of American popular music — the roots of jazz and the blues — from professional jazz and blues connoisseurs who always try to package jazz through their own resentment fuelled connoisseurship, and from academics who want to historicise it out of existence, through a nice and class analysis. He argues that even the most brain-bogglingly racist rag or 'coo' song contains in it a valiance of and aspiration towards some idea of African American culture, even if it is extremely virtual. For better or for worse, this aspiration created pop music — hybrid, exploitative and 'hot' — as we know it. Wondrich writes a history told from the point of view of heads of rock 'n' roll as a fundamental category of experience. In doing so, like *Like Sense* in the day, he opens up the music again to the broad and contradictory social currents that produced it — in this case a monstrous tangle of racism, military marching

bands, class war and assimilationism. He doesn't elevate the music into a new type of classical music the way the jazz boffs did, precisely to obscure the music's unpleasant roots. He knows what he likes — 'hot' music, rhythm and grandness, naked — and knows the price that has been paid for it. Which continues to be paid today.

*Stomp And Swerve* goes over some of the same terrain covered by WI Sherman's *A's Raging Cox: Blackface Performance From Jim Crow To Hip Hop* and Cecil Brown's recent *Stagolee Shot Bally*. While these books examine African American stereotypes and myths as cultural history, Wondrich emphasises the ways that white US culture, in its various forms, appropriated, synthesised and popularised African forms — which in turn evolved in response to transformed white cultures. The white culture that emerges out of his study is something similar to what we read about in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the role of an upright New England despotism to free the US mainland from a boat full of African, Asian and Polynesian men, captured by a madman. Except in this case he stays at home. □

## AUTUMN RHYTHM

RICHARD MELTZER  
DA CAPO PRESS \$22.95

BY DAVID KEEMAN

Subtitled *Musings On Time, Tide, Aging, Dying, And Such Like*, *Autumn Rhythm* is rock critic at large and current *Smagog* vocalist Richard Meltzer's best and profoundest book, taking stock of his new status as 'an old fading fog' with the help of some inspired 'genealogy' and looking back at the teenage wasteland over which he has presided since the publication of his epochal *Autumn Rhythms* Of Rock book in 1970.

Interestingly enough, 1970 is also the date after which Meltzer claims the 20th century itself went to hell, 'where the means were found to sweep all wisdom, all true sass, and most (if not quite literally all) beauty under the rug, to brush it off humanity's underwear... — many, so-o-o many things happening only to happen, to be trivialised and marginalised by failure, success, and the overnight of Crowd Control Central' (which you can't even exist); to understand their own being, behaviour and direction their own act, to self-tissue-paper reality. And I can't just talking rock and uh ROLL.'

Despite his well-documented disdain for all things rock-related these days, there's plenty of

good music writing in here, with key events in his life as well as with record releases, like where he recalls the first — now virtually indistinct — of reaching a record-speed milestone in your life, say 45 or 33 1/3. Now he's out the other side and while record speeds separate him from these same trifles, like the day he and some friends first heard *The Beatles' White Album*, played in its entirety by New York radio station WABC. 'After the second play of "Good Night", rings a neo-Martyan masterpiece, we scampered out into the cold, high on more than the hash, and looked up at her heels, lazing (far probably the final time in the 60s... or ever) a distinct shade of UNLIMITED POSSIBILITY' he writes. 'Then Allen, a rocker who until then hadn't even liked *The Beatles*, was driven to say, "Well, I guess the object is no longer just to listen, or even memorize... it's for everybody to internalize this and SPEAK IT".'

The book is full of dazzling paragraphs like this, recollections of a time when popular music was about something more than mere commerce, a fact that this far down the line is sometimes hard to believe, never mind remember.

And what about this vivid description of a seductively sophomore solo by a 62 year old Coleman Hawkins, a minute and a half into 'Time On My Hands' at his last studio session in

1966: 'Autro time exploded, matter too, and Siras, brightest star in the heavens, becomes a nation star... a campfire, a matchbox afire in a skeleton hand. All entropy, all destiny comprises the final resolution to a throaty whisper... a final peep. A poignant MAGNIFICENT peep, but a peep... then neverending stillness.'

But fans of Meltzer's notoriously spurious 'groupthink' needn't sweat, as cited throughout the book are some of his most searing and unerringly aimed critiques, trades against MTV (alongside AIDS and disposable diapers, Meltzer's other great conspiracy of the century) and the idea of JFK as a liberal, links nayside dig about America's rampant homophobia (with the fat of Gorrie Diamond, say, as a professed heterosocial evildoer nothing), the Beats as coffee table fodder, Ed Wood versus Jean Cocteau, religious indoctrination as child abuse and *The Rolling Stones' 2000 Man* as prophecy. Yet despite all the fun, the overall tone is melancholy, at points almost dispiriting. Meltzer sounds like a man completely alone at the end of his life, driven by a compulsion to write that makes less and less sense, suffering from 'the bitter exhaustion of having to cheerlead my own act', 'Lack was never mine,' he sighs. 'Whatever

could go wrong, did.' Much of the closing section is given over to an analysis of his complicated relationship with his mother, who he confesses he regularly fantasised about fucking and who features on a tormented tattoo on his arm inscribed 'MOM' along with a cartoon of one of her limbs rising up from the dirt. A Freudian would have a field day, and with Freud being one of Meltzer's favorite poets, he even thinks in a couple of mother-lust verses in tribute. Then there are the simultaneously hilarious and heartwarming transcriptions of present day conversations with his mother, whose declining mental faculties mean that she now barely remembers him at all.

In terms of Meltzer's oeuvre to date — and despite his pessimism it looks pretty certain that this won't be his last — *Autumn Rhythm* feels more centrally alive, more all-encompassing, more human (with all of his accompanying heartbreak and wretchedness) than anything he's ever written before. Anyone who has ever lived will find succor in the facility with which he penetrates the superficial veneer that increasingly passes for actual experience and ours right to the heart of whatever is at hand, be it love, art, cars, or greater gods. Anyone who hasn't, well, he's your man. Good luck. □

# Cross Platform

Sound in other media. This month: Julian Cowley examines artist Bill Fontana's sonic readymades, and hears how his environmental art makes sound travel at the speed of light



Above: Bill Fontana. Left to right: For his *Primer* soundings installation in Leeds, he blended sounds from the town hall's clocktower, underground streams and Cheltenham Reservoir wind farm

"My work exists one foot in and out of contemporary music, one foot in and out of contemporary art, on the edge of some science, on the edge of philosophy. Sound enters so many different worlds," observes sound artist Bill Fontana, visiting London en route to his home in San Francisco. "I'm very interested in the relationship of what you see to what you hear, because what you see so much influences how you conceptualise sounds. I'm interested in deconstructing people's normal relationship to sight and sound. All sound is really a description of the space that you put it in," Fontana's ambitious projects, realised in locations across the world during the past 25 years, highlight ways in which our experience of sound phenomena is intimately related to the physical properties of the space in which it occurs. "Sound as a medium is still lost a lot in our culture," he continues. "Architects hardly think about it. We design space visually and don't think about the relationships between sounds that exist in spaces."

In 1987 Fontana created a "soundbridge" between sites in San Francisco and Cologne, combining selected acoustic environments from those cities by means of live satellite transmission. The resultant mix of Californian foghorns and German church bells, creaking of the Golden Gate Bridge and noise of ships on the Rhine was also broadcast in real time by numerous radio stations and collected on the Wergo release *Wired/City/Soundbridge Köln/San Francisco*. In 1993 he arranged another intercontinental exchange,

linking Cologne with Kyoto, channelling sounds from each to an open air loudspeaker installation in the other, the turning of a Japanese water wheel in counterpoint against flow of traffic in Germany. Disrupted timezones within Marshall McLuhan's much touted 'global village' were made audible through these miraculously executed exercises in acoustic simultaneity. The fabric of the heard environment in each place was disrupted and reconfigured. Unfamiliar alignments of sounds invited reflection upon randomness and routine, upon unpredictable occurrences and those underlying patterns of behaviour and events that lend shape to urban life.

Fontana's sophisticated dislocations of ordinary, unmodified sounds resemble Marcel Duchamp's readymades. In a poem Duchamp wrote about his glass painting *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*, the French dadaist described the piece as "a sounding sculpture", a description Fontana has adopted as a precedent to his own work, even though it contains no physical objects. Fontana started out as a regular composer. "A lot of the training that was really important to me I got in the practice of doing it," he says, "because I was essentially working with an artform that hadn't existed before. I started in the 60s, doing sound installations, and I suppose my most important influences at that time were John Cage and people associated with him in New York." Fontana accordingly moved to New York from the Midwest, where he had grown up, and attended the New School

for Social Research in 1970, studying with Fluxus musician Philip Corner.

He got to know John Cage personally, but these encounters were enabling stimuli rather than direct leads into the field. He is still exploring. "Sound sculpture was not a medium anyone initiated me into," he says. "It was something I developed myself. I'd been interested in acoustic phenomena for a long time, the idea that sound exists in air, water, solids and that the velocity of sounds in these mediums is different. I'm really interested in the physics of sound." His acoustic curiosity fostered an early obsession with recording ambient sound, intensified during the mid-1970s when he was employed by the Australian Broadcasting Company to tape that continent's sonic profile. In 1976 he made his first sound sculpture, an eight-channel recording of wave action at Kirribilli Wharf in Sydney that was subsequently installed in a gallery.

This and later works, such as the sea sounds and shingle wash from *Chesil Beach* in Dorset installed permanently at London's National Maritime Museum, bear superficial resemblance to documentary, often ecologically oriented, "soundscapes" projects initiated by Canadian composer R Murray Schafer. Fontana finds these soundscapes aesthetically uninteresting. He is alert to naturally or subconsciously structured musical processes taking place within environments. In addition, he points out, "making a recording of a sound is a compositional thing. You have to frame the





recording, make choices about how to hear it. The instruments I use for listening have changed, expanded, especially in the last couple of years. In the beginning I used acoustic microphones and now I use accelerometers, which are the sensitive, scientific version of contact microphones. They really enable you to get inside structures and become the thing you are listening to, in a way."

Fontana's recent trips to England have come to fruition in a long-term installation, *Phreal Soundings*, at Leeds City Art Gallery, inaugurated during the city's FUSELEEDS04 festival in March. "My experience in Leeds began with a very unusual piece of Victorian architecture called the Dark Arches, four 200 metre long arched tunnels that run under the railway station," he relates. "One of those mysterious, strange pieces. The River Aire goes through it, and when there's been a lot of rain, the sound is very impressive. It held a fascination for me, this sense of power, elemental sound, force of nature. I started making underwater recordings with hydrophones and initially worked to make a sound installation inside the Dark Arches."

Then a visit to the Yorkshire Dales National Park brought a geological dimension into Fontana's thinking. "Some years ago," he remembers, "in the Geophysics Department at the University of Colorado, I'd seen a computer screen that had continuous wavy lines across it. It was geological noise, the low frequencies of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans hitting the continental shelf of the US. I went to the Earth Sciences department of

Leeds University and found they are connected to the British Geological Survey and have six seismometers buried in various parts of the Yorkshire countryside. I was able to access that network and make some very unusual recordings of wonderful subsonic low frequency sounds. They're microseisms, like a continuous miniature earthquake, caused mostly by the sea impacting on bedrock and echoing underground. Wind through trees can also cause them. To hear them you need a good sub-woofer." At the Chelher Reservoir wind farm, in the Dales, he found another ingredient for the Leeds project. "The wind farm has two-blade turbines which are much noisier than the usual three-blade. It's a very humbling experience to have these giant propellers spinning above your head, whooshing, whirring, thumping."

The finished installation is concerned in terms of a listener's movement through the Leeds City Art Gallery building. Underwater sounds from the River Aire and the Dark Arches can be heard at the outer facade, adjacent to the Henry Moore Institute, overlooking a small plaza. The turbines and subsonic sounds pass through space in the Silver Gallery, an area dedicated to contemporary artwork, next to a sculpture terrace where the outdoor water speakers are situated. As you enter the building you hear a Victorian clockwork mechanism from Leeds City Hall and the clock bell ringing hourly. "If you are standing in front of the gallery you'll hear the bell at the speed of sound," declares Fontana. "When you open the door, the transmitted sound is going to be arriving at

the speed of light. In a sense when you open the door you are walking into the future."

He relishes such mind games. In 1999, his sound sculpture *Acoustical Visions Of Venice* offered a similar jolt to the senses based on the lag between the sound of bells heard with and without the aid of multiple microphones. "A physicist explained to me that I had created a multi-dimensional space, temporally. Visually nothing changed. Sound is an investigation of what the experience of time is. I'm fascinated with investigating the aesthetics of time and the moment, simultaneously, synchronicity, asynchronicity." In 1984, for *Distant Trans*, Fontana buried loudspeakers in a derelict field near the Berlin Wall where the Anhalter Bahnhof, a busy railway station, had once stood and channelled through them a live transmission of the bustling, hectic sounds of a fully operative station in Cologne – a probe into acoustic memory.

Fontana regards many of his projects as "experiments in perception" and looks ahead to the next with an experimenter's restlessness. His current plans include exploration of the soundworld of arts, in conjunction with the California Academy of Science in San Francisco, and transference of more clockwork mechanism and bell sounds – historically urban regulators – from the landmark tower of Westminster's Big Ben to a colonnade connecting public space to the chambers of the House of Commons. □ Bill Fontana's Website: [www.fusesoundings.org](http://www.fusesoundings.org). For more information about FUSELEEDS04, go to [www.fuseleeds.org.uk](http://www.fuseleeds.org.uk)



Trademark: the blues: John Lee Hooker, Chuck D

## THE BLUES PRODUCED BY MARTIN SCORSESE

SHAPED BY MUSIC TRADEMARKS

BY ALICEYIN WATKIN

"The blues is a chair," John Lennon declared in 1970. He did not say whose chair it was. Son House may have baulked at Lennon's allusion to Platonic form, but his own exaggerated definition is no less categorical, proposing an ideal theme: "There aren't but one kind of blues and that's between a male and a female in love." Tellingly, for House the crucial issue is gender, not race. For Willis Dixon, author of many definitive Chess recordings including the cheerfully dourmous *I Am The Blues*, the issue is musical influence. "The blues are the roots and everything else is the fruit," says blues guitarist Taj Mahal, quoting Dixon in Martin Scorsese's *Feel Like Going Home*, his own contribution to the documentary series he also produced, called *The Blues*. Consisting of seven feature length films celebrating the genre, it covers all three perspectives – form, content and history – and much else besides. However, unlike the three jokers quoted, it also makes a preposterous proprietary claim by the addition of "TM" to the title.

As Lee Pennman notes, when reviewing the accompanying CDs (Soundcheck, The Wire 239), there is something insufferable about this presumption. Trademarking "the blues" runs counter to the music's polluting essence, as well as to one of the series' own tenets. As the voiceover in *Feel Like Going Home* states, "The white man could take away everything else but the one thing they could never take away from black people is the blues." Well, Scorsese was a white man last time I checked.

Instead, taking his cue from Lennon, Scorsese invited himself and six other directors to describe their version of the chair. Unfortunately, the first consequence of this promising decision is overlap – undue repetition, an overreliance on tired stereotypes and ready myths of the "sold my soul to the devil at the crossroads last midnight" type. The worst offender in this regard is Charles Burnett's *Warning By The Devil's Fire*, a quasi-autobiographical account of the sentimental education of a ten-year-old boy at the hands of his ne'er do well uncle Buddy, who waylays him in New Orleans on his way to be baptised. The elongated parade of stock situations through which Buddy trots him simply serves to cue the glorious music rather than create a dramatic interest of its own.

Wim Wenders also opts for dramatic re-enactment

but has no better success. On paper, his approach is intriguing. His instalment, *The Soul Of A Man*, concentrates on three lesser known but intriguing figures, Blind Willie Johnson, Skip James and JB Lenon, the last two being Wenders's particular favourites. An alternative history so often reveals what's been lying in plain view all along but this one proves merely eccentric. Wenders has taken some pains to construct a narrative – Johnson's voiceover comes to us from the Voyager's spacecraft, which is carrying the Library of Congress recordings into deep space (making him an alien ambassador for the human race). The dramatic interludes are shot on pented cameras in black and white but the effect is didactic rather than revelatory. Wenders muddles his thesis still further by including, midstream, a long interview with a couple of handy Lenonists who shot extensive footage of their hero during the 1960s for Swedish TV. The sequence is weirdly compelling but, sadly, not persuasive at all.

As a veteran pianist, actor and director, Clint Eastwood should, by rights, have produced a scintillating survey of keyboard mania with *Piano Blues*. But unfortunately his is the leastable film of the lot, basking in the warm glow of its maker's own celebrity. Eastwood simply hires a studio (on his own production lot), invites an impressive array of the surviving musicians – Ray Charles, Pinetop Perkins, Dave Brubeck, Marcus Bell and Oscar Peterson – to drop by and ask them all, "What got you started?" The responders tend to be pat, emphasising the constant refinements of style. Dr John's more oblique answer is the most suggestive – he claims that there were so many "bad" piano players in New Orleans "that was what made me want to be a guitar player". In a just world, Dr John would have narrated this episode – his exotic manner and encyclopedic knowledge should be preserved before it's too late. The title of *Red White And Blues* memorises Mike Figgis's first group but that's as self-indulgent as he gets. His film traces the evolution of the British blues, which is a history of hybrid, some might say bastardised, styles. Figgis knows all the arguments – can the white man sing the blues? – but he doesn't bother reviving them. He knows that his interviewees (Humphrey Lyttleton, Eric Clapton, Lomme Donegan) will do that. His eye for detail – Chris Farlowe's defensive posture, Peter Green's abiding passion – brings fresh perspective to this oftold tale. The mixture of loustic reminiscence, bittersweet resentment, stale accolade, blinding enthusiasm and

unlikely alliance (Tom Jones and Jeff Beck) testifies to the strength and depth of the "British" response to the blues, as does the inescapable sense that, for many, these crusading days were their glory ones.

Equally lively is Marc Levin's tribute to the entrepreneurial spirit that established Chess Records as the home of the Chicago Blues, *Godfathers And Sons*, which makes excellent use of rapidfire Marshall Chess, Leonard Chess's unembarrassable son. Chess sees the film as a chance to improve his historical standing and campaign for wider recognition of *Electric Mud*, the psychedelic update of Muddy Waters's *Urban Strut* which he produced in 1968. A chance email from Public Enemy's Chuck D plays right into his hands. Quicker than you can say "dollar signs," he conceives a scheme to reassemble the "Mud" band and update the sound still further with assistance from Chuck and his Hip Hop crew. Levin is content to sit back and watch as Chuck is inducted into the complex mysteries of his roots.

Richard Pearce's *The Rose To Memphis* is another exemplary observation, a road movie about the endlessness of the road, about the existential treadmill of the chitlin circuit, where fame is a velvet version of just getting by. It traces the fates of BB King and the lesser known Buddy Rush as they make their eternal rounds, cocooned in their private tour buses, locked into increasingly dreary routines, seeing it all for the stage. At its centre is the regal BB, exquisitely gracious, discribing a personal watershed – the first time he played the Fillmore West, he walked out onto the stage and all the hippies stood up. He's humbled by the experience. "I ain't never had this happen to me, ever in life," he says, aware of its historical moment and still amazed.

Scorsese's own contribution, *Feel Like Going Home*, presents the strongest thesis of all. Written by Peter Guralnick, it traces the music's caustic essence through the desperation of the Black American experience to something more ancient, a metaphysical sense of estrangement. The argument is given a treatment befitting its complexity, full of allusion and penetrating social context, but it may also be seen at a glance. The episode begins with a brief, dreamlike vision. A gate opens. Three black men, musicians, burst into a wooded glade. They circle one another like wolves, a life beginning, drums goading it on. The men are dressed for the 20th century but the scene is primordial. The shrill two note riff has an unquenchable immortal edge – Platonic synchrony. □



Top left: Still from Mathias Polak's *Life Activity*. Bottom left: Re-packing electronic music at Berlin Biennial's *Sonic Shapes*. Right: Still from *Haack: The King Of Techno*

### 3RD BERLIN BIENNIAL BERLIN VARIOUS VENUES GERMANY

BY BEN BORNWICK

For the third Berlin Biennial, curator Ute Meta Bauer set out to explore themes such as urbanism and architecture, feminism, fashion, music and immigration. Each of these themes had its own 'hub' – a way of getting away from the traditional arrangement of rooms after monographic rooms of work by individual artists.

We should, in theory, have made room for an interesting narrative, but the problem is the very idea of what constitutes an exhibition – does art necessarily have to be a visual experience or can stacks of photocopies, headphones and reading rooms be considered equally valid within a museum context? I tend to agree with the latter, providing the layout doesn't ignore the particularities of the museum walls. The ease of whiling away a couple of hours in a tiny record or bookshop browsing zones and library covers simply does not have the same lure in a sit-down white cube because galleries exude an air of passing interest as opposed to the embedded fanaticalism of a specialist store. The Sonic Shapes hub fell into this trap, a room with benches, headphones and videos with photocopies of articles from magazines (including *The Wire*) stacked up and plastered on the wall. The premise 'Re-Punk Electronic Music' – that women have taken up the legacy of punk to inject some life force into the

clicks + cuts boys' brigade – might be valid, but its manifestation in the gallery felt lifeless.

Unfortunately, the pickings were also thin in the presentation of individual artists. Miks Vennio's installation *Something Like Berlin Story* was in a tiny dingy little chair three chairs squashed up to two speakers from which emanated the familiar sound of Berlin – construction sites and the sounds of a city in process. Unfortunately Vennio had failed to engage with the spatial qualities of the installation.

A standout work was French artist Ergen Cenüs' *Oil's* installation *Entanglement*. Each wall was covered in a jiggle of helicopters flying in the night, identifiable only by the pulsing sound and smaller glint of their spotlights. Standing in the space, there is a sense of being enclosed in a web of overhead surveillance. The same piece was encapsulated from a balcony on the floor above where you were afforded a panoramic perspective looking down from the helicopters, the spotlights becoming searchlights on the ground.

Samira Ghoz-Fadell's extraordinary *Die Berlin-Cinéma* was possibly the most installed work in the show, exiled to acoustic hell in a dizzied grand staircase. Staircases are for passing from one place to another, so nobody stopped. However, I chanced on a particularly exquisitely exchange between Wim Wenders and Jean Koenig on the relationship between age and surface in the arts, whether film, architecture or music.

Mathias Polak's *Activity* is an exquisite film of a rock group in rehearsal. High production

values, good looking, stylized actors and the promise of an instrument song draws you in.

Guitar chords begin hastily then peter out as the rhythm begins, only to have another go. Despite the soundtrack being composed by Red Krayola's Mijo Thompson and ex-Minuteman George Hurley, the film comes across for early 80s radicalism. The shots never encompass the whole scene but are a series of fragments, a visual clue that the film is, ultimately, a fetishistic stylization of *No Wave*. Here is a group of people trying to mirror the surfaces of that moment while all sense of possibility and energy has been exhausted.

### HAACK: THE KING OF TECHNO PHILIP ANANGNOS (DIRECTOR) SEVENTH-ART RELEASING

BY KAREN HOLLINGS

Alan Entwistle, an engineer formerly employed by Ian Scott's Long Island studios during the late 60s, gives a wonderful description of electronic music visionary Bruce Haack's work. "He was mystical," Entwistle relates in the magnificently creaky *Dimension* documentary. His insistence on a concrete floor, and sit there for four hours straight. Then he would get up and start "making". Scott himself speaks of collaborating with Haack in similarly mystical terms, as if God himself had ordained that they should record together. Like a number of his contemporaries, including Mort Garson,

Gershon Kingsley, Beaver & Krause and Jean-Jacques Perrey, Haack saw a spiritual dimension to the sounds coming out of his circuits. However, as film maker Philip Anangnos demonstrates during the course of this thoughtful documentary (still awaiting distribution), no one else expressed that vision in such complex and paradoxical terms.

Hailing from Alberta, Canada and educated in composition at New York's Juilliard School of Music, Haack had both his light and dark moments. His beautifully synched electric songs with their springtastic vocal effects could be approached from two highly divergent routes, leaving the listener to wonder which was the real Bruce Haack. On the one hand, there was the Bruce Haack who, with enlightened educator Esther Nelson, created a highly successful series of albums for the Dimension 5 label designed to teach children to dance and sing. Then there was the Bruce Haack responsible for recording the underground classic *Electric Lucifer*, who sought in drink and drugs a refuge from an industry he increasingly came to suspect of abusing his talents. The two faces of Jesus finally come together, as Anangnos reveals, when CBS refused to release *Haackus*, a particularly aious set of misanthropic outpourings that were then cleaned up and repackaged as *Bite*, an album of hidef' nightmares for Dimension 5.

What emerges from these two extremes is a withdrawn and giddy he-spirit who, according to the testimony of friends and



Main pic: Port of Juneau/Projects' "Mother" King Nature exhibition. Right: Still from *Interface* DVD, with Pealine Olivares

colleagues, was not particularly well equipped to handle the daily business of making music for a living. Former songwriting partner Praxiteles Pandoi speaks of Haack's reluctance to hawk his wares around the City Building during the late 1950s. His enthusiastic manager and true believer Chris Kochulis recalls how Haack would often laugh off his attempts to mail out demos to any potentially interested parties. Certainly, the archive footage presented here of early TV appearances, most notably on a 1960 episode of *Five Got A Secret* in which Haack giddily plays Pandoi's forehead as if it were a theremin, reveals a man of sly enthusiasm born uncomfortably out of tune with his time. Even though contemporary acts such as Moose On Mars, Money Mark, Antarctic Lights and Tisay are ready to express on camera their appreciation of Bruce Haack's pioneering experiments in electronic music composition, there's still a feeling that the tender madness of his vision has yet to touch the world.

## JUNEAU/PROJECTS: /MOTHER/ "KING NATURE

LONDON THE SHOWROOM

UK

BY LINA DZUNKE RODD RUSSELL

Juneau/Projects' "exhibition Mother" "King Nature" felt like revisiting the world of a boy I knew at school whose entire life revolved around melting objects that came into his

possession. Endless battery operated toys, dolls and even somebody's Walkman all met their sorry ends in his hands, but it all seemed worthwhile just to witness his joy at watching his monstrous experiments unfold. The work of the Birmingham based duo Phil Duckworth and Ben Sadler, who operate under the name of Juneau/Projects, is driven by the same fascination with pushing gadgets and consumer electronics to the point of collapse. In this case the added satisfaction comes from using the technology's ability to record its own destruction, giving birth to performances in which the melting, the freezing and the grinding down of gizmos becomes amplified, recorded and broadcast.

Entering the Showroom gallery feels like stumbling into a log cabin inhabited by a mechanic with a passion for gardening. Hundreds of houseplants cover the debris of leads, computer monitors, TV screens and turntables scattered on the gallery floor. Several monitors show documentation of previous Juneau/Projects' performances which visitors are invited to watch as they make themselves comfortable on vinyl upholstered logs dotted around the gallery. Activities such as dragging a speaker across a forest floor and the freezing of a hard drive are documented on the screens. The tortured gadgets busily record and amplify their own demise, providing the due with material for further performances and exhibitions.

The gallery, *It transpires*, is organised like a journey, and the screens, debris and previous performance works all belong to different episodes of the duo's vividly constructed world populated by three key characters – The Mash, The Don and The Kingpin – who each appear in different roles throughout the performances.

The closing night of the exhibition featured a performance, adding another episode to the duo's narrative. In a reading-cum-noise piece, Juneau/Projects' took the packed gallery on a journey. Using vocoder, sound effects and distant radio broadcasts, they guided the audience through the woods in search of the Kingpin – a chilling tale. The performance ended with the magnificent soaring noise of a contact microphone piece of wood ending its lifespan in a Black & Decker chipper.

## INTERFACE RECORDING FIELD, H

BY WILL MONTGOMERY

Interface work live with five electronic treatment sensor bass (played by Curtis Bahia), sensor violin and sensor speaker array (Don Threinen) and a dancer controlling sounds with her body movements (Tami Hahn). Featured on three of the five tracks is Pealine Olivares, playing computer treated accordion, and this DVD, released on her own Deep Listening label, documents their performance. Interface's music, with its dependence on sensors, has a keen



relationship to the moving human body, whether the bow wielding hand of the violinist, or the arm of the dancer. Each gestural's musical intent is fed through a Powerbook and reinterpreted. I'd like to have seen Interface perform with Olivares. Yet the intimacy and live-ness of the live event is always distinct from the reproduction.

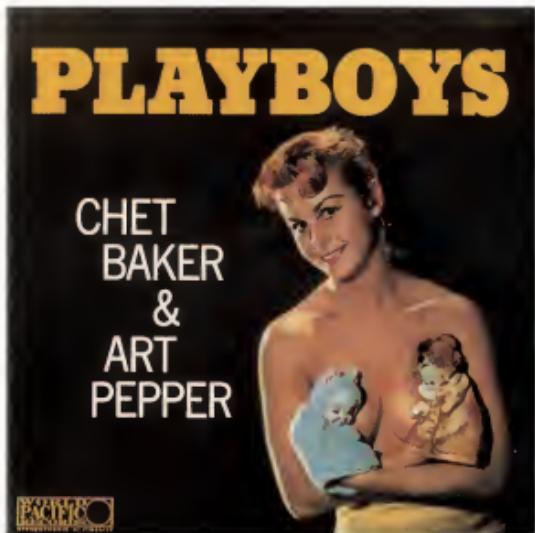
On three of the tracks there's not much to look at – a handful of musicians in close up and a lot of hardware. Even watching Den Husman wiggling away at his cello, I'm still reduced "bowed speaker army" is of passing interest only.

The dance pieces present a different problem. The Japan-trained Tami Hahn performs liquid quadrilles in the first – there's an image of water in the background and she triggers sound events with what you might call "flowing" movements. In the second she mimics with marionette jessaka wearing a shiny pink space-jeans jump suit. If I'd been in the audience I'd certainly have closed my eyes and I might even have fled.

The music performed on the DVD, however, is compelling, particularly on the ensemble pieces, ghostly scraps and warped string sounds blending with accordion, shakuhachi and digital noise. At one time one can kill the visuals and listen to what's really admirable about this work: the delicate feeling of the sounds into a continually evolving web of music, the complex spatialisation achieved within the stereo image, the tautness of the group improvisation. □

# The Inner Sleeve

Artwork selected this month by Kim Gordon



## CHET BAKER & ART PEPPER PLAYBOYS

PACIFIC JAZZ 1956

Chet Baker & Art Pepper's *Playboys* is perhaps not my favorite record cover, but it was the first one to catch my attention and haunt me as a young child. I used to play with my dad's record collection, which consisted mostly of jazz and early blues.

I would pick out certain records and rearrange

them into narratives based on their cover images. I always picked out *Playboys*, because its contrast of cleavage and stuffed animals intrigued me, but it would often sit off to the side unable to fit into any narrative. I liked the animal puppets but was afraid of the breasts. It was unlike any of the other covers. It was very weird, what was this precociously topless woman doing on a record with such abstract music, and what were those puppets doing on her breasts?

*Playboys* was recorded in 1956, nearly 50 years before Britney Spears nibbed our consumer eyes in her *Lolita* fantasy. But it's a woman on the cover of Chet Baker and Art Pepper's record, and women are pure jazz. Or maybe young naughty girls were just older then. I would be shocked today if I saw a young girl being sexually provocative on the cover of a contemporary jazz record, whether it was the artist herself or borrowed sensibility.

I think the woman on the cover is more mysterious than any cleaved-over or actual diva star icon on a *Rolling Stone* cover. The blackness surrounding her, the reddish cast to her body, gives her a smoldering 3D quality. Had I bothered to read the first song title on the record, I might have had a clue for my narrative: "For Mimosas Only." As an eight year old, I had better things to do. ☐ Kim Gordon is a visual artist and founder member of Sonic Youth

## Go To:



**Weightless Animals** ([www.weightlessanimals.com](http://www.weightlessanimals.com)) is the result of inventors Kalle Matthews and Zeena Parkins teaming up with visual artist Mandy Molmoh to make an audiovisual soundtrack to outer space at NASA HQ in Houston, Texas. As they state in the introduction, "We are three people who make work from our surroundings. We chose space because it is the ultimate surrounding and because we love the glamour of the human attempts to navigate it. Our work is made from samples and innovations, visually and sonically. We interviewed astronauts, hung out with a mission controller and a rocket scientist. Then we spent a long time on line gathering raw stuff." *Weightless Animals* is made up of episodes sound work utilizing NASA archival recordings, interview snippets, and samples from the Outpost Tavern jukebox, the local saloon and artificial NASA bar down the road from the space station. The visuals are a graphic take (they call them

"impressionistic sonic cartoons") on their stay in Houston and their personal impression of floating in zero gravity (it makes for big hair, apparently), interviewing a string of rocket scientists and astronauts, and accessing various footage. The diary section is a very personal account of the days spent at NASA and makes fascinating reading. The pieces are a blend of gassy soundscapes and noisy satellite conversations between space shuttle crew and ground workers, morning "page talk" from the station officials, music selected by each astronaut's family and piped into the ship, and an excessive early slide guitar piece paying homage to the Outpost Tavern. A chance to join in the improvisations using interactive sound games is also offered.

The site is a smooth, beautifully programmed site, and you'll wish you owned the music it deserves much better than tiny computer speakers. Thankfully, a picture disc release is underway on Matthews's *Artiseworks* label ([www.artiseworks.com](http://www.artiseworks.com)). You can access the site and get compressed audio using a dial-up connection, but for my money – an advertising site like *Weightless Animals* is worth a broadband subscription alone.

**Londondempsey** ([www.londondempsey.com](http://www.londondempsey.com)) is a new resource set up by the soon-to-be-launched *London* Catalogue. Its purpose is to keep track of the expanding universe of free musicians living and working in the English capital. The site lists gigs, and there's a facility to upload your own details. Streaming video files include clips from last year's Freedom Of The City festival, and there's a gallery of photos from the live scene and artwork by associated artists. Unlike so many sites serving small scenes, this one actually feels "live", continually updated and refreshed by its contributors' forum.

ANNE HILDE NIESET

# On Location

Live and kicking: festivals, concerts, events in the flesh





SMILEY culture: Brian Wilson and The Wondersmiths

**BRIAN WILSON: SMILE**  
LONDON ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL  
UK

BY DAVID TICOM

SMILE bootlegs have been around for a long time. My first taste of this forbidden fruit came courtesy of Barry Appleby's *Sea Of Tastes* tape on Canwest Tapes, probably in the early 1980s. In those days, there was an uncertainty about distinguishing between a genuine SMiLE track, composed by Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks specifically for that project, and an unreleased Beach Boys track. Gradually the fuller picture emerged, yet constructing a hypothetical setlist in the absence of the album was impossible. How to make sense of the lengthy studio sessions in which Brian asked wild musicians to laugh into their instruments, or see pieces of wood? How to compose an imaginary structure in which brief fragments of exquisitely or simply cozy orchestration — tuba, glassbells, vibraphone, marimba, flugelhorn, electric keyboards, slide guitar, tympani, piccato strings, power tools, hamsters, animal sound impressions, raw vegetables — seem through alienation and variation to unknown themes?

Only one person could illuminate these mysteries, more tantalising than years rolled by, and he wouldn't, probably couldn't tell. I asked Wilcox in a 1986 interview, and as if calculating to crush the conversation, he told me that the *SMILE* pieces were "contaminated with no soul." OK, point taken, but where did that judgment come from? Too many questions to answer them; time to shelf customer curmudgeons about dubious

reconstructions and metapsychological nostalgia and lead for the only gag in town.

Clearly a strategy was in place, and I would imagine this was based on Brian's terror of public exposure, the colossal expectations now weighing so heavily on SM&LE, and the sheer complexity of the material. Even in 2004, when Brian Caine can talk about La Monte Young (and Brian Wilson) on BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*, could an audience deal with the weirdness that is, in some part, to Wilson's loss of confidence back in 1968?

So the concert began with The Wunderkinder gathered in a hectoring handshake, Brian at the centre, leading them in largely a capella versions of leading songs from *The Moon Is Blue*.

ersions or barcodes such as "in my heart", "Keep An Eye On Summer" and "Please Let Me Wonder". To be frank, I was overwhelmed, and the strength of that complicated emotional response (Brian Wilson's history, my history, the pathos of the lyrics, the beauty of the melodies and Brian's majestic *harmonies*) somehow confirmed that these total *harmonies* as songs within soul. But that's not the point, as the second half of the concert proved. Partnashki glued back together into a cohesive sequence of interviews, tributes, interludes and grand statements, thanks to ProTools editing software, Wondermilk co-founder David Gahanaga and the renewed enthusiasm of Wilson and Van Dyke Parks. *SMiCE* is one of the great sing-along sets of American music history. Let's not call it a concept album, or a rock opera. Let's make Harry Povich's hooro suites, Duke Ellington's *waves* of *Heaven*, George Gershwin's *Pogy* and *Bess* (and the Miles Davis/CJ Evans version),

which seems echoed in moments of *SM(LE)*, L. Bodo's thematic LPs, Richard Maxfield's electronic experiments, and Frank Sinatra's in *The Wee Small Hours*, as just a few relevant reference points.

What became clearer, from this extraordinary achievement of playing such fiendishly difficult, intricate, fast-moving and gregarious music live, is that Wilson and Parks were trying to evoke a bicycle journey through American folk memory and popular song, a Pilgrim's Progress from Flywheel Rock (delivered under the sunburst a dream wherein is disclosed the manner of His setting out, his dangerous journey and safe arrival...) leading to personal redemption through the power of music.

On sure, tough guy, it sounds pretentious and seedy, but the alchemy emerged through Iraen's genius for tempering Van Dyke's decadent tendencies, the ornate obscurantism of his intellect, with compositions that were earthbound and funny, yet just as serious and utterly up on the cutting edge.

It's debatable whether SMILE could have been performed to anybody's satisfaction in 1968. Just look at the RTH stage: a small string section, horn section, drums, percussion, three keyboards (one of them then barely touched by Brian throughout the entire show), bass, two or three guitars, electric synthsphere and a female vocal. That sounds like a lot of people, but with most of the musicians knownly doubling on everything from banjo, French horn and theremin to harpsichord, alto flute, clarinet and leslis (see below)? Listen about all the keyboards able

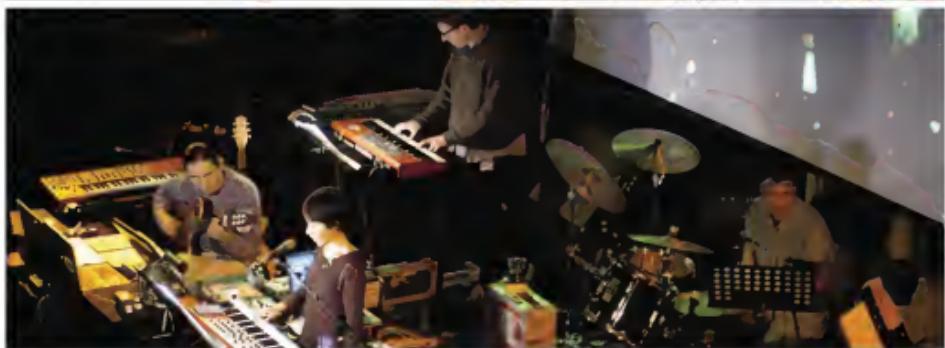
to replicate all the sounds from the original tapes, the set-up was amazingly compact.

Add to that the advances in PA technology over 18 years and the ability of the musicians to play in virtually my style, plus sing acoustic Beach Boys harmonies in tune, and you had a show that was absolutely right for the moment, despite the pop-nan envisagings any hentie might be inclined to harbour. Fine hats were worn during 'Mrs O'Leary's Cow', I can imagine the Beach Boys would have embarrassed themselves with such hats; however, it seemed a good opportunity to relieve the tension of keeping up with Brian's convoluted charts.

And Brian himself; how did he fare? He looked fragile, though totally professional, and his voice was worn to the bone with ageing and the appalling phonological stresses of his past, but that seemed to suit the situation. His approximate pitching and lower register made the event feel real, rather than a shallow reconstruction.

"Then came his masterpiece and when he was through, he smiled down from Heaven and he gave me you." Those words from "The Old Master Painter," a film from 1955 briefly referenced in passing, then segueing into a playful quote from "You Are My Sunshine," may have been Wilson's intention at the start, unsurprisingly, given the shabby circumstances, the drugs, and the Hercules task of patching together all these fragments and ideas without a computer; he got lost back then. We know the old story, but how he found a way back into a sense of music we shouldn't have to live without. How unbelievable is that? □

## On Location



## HENRY GRIMES & WILLIE PARKER

### PHILADELPHIA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA USA

BY DAVID KEENAN

The discovery and rehabilitation in 2002 of bassist Henry Grimes, a key architect of the free jazz revolution of the 60s, was emblematic of both the music's comparative abandonment by critics, promoters and fans in the intervening years and the elevated historical position that it now holds in the eyes and ears of contemporary commentators. Grimes ten toils

across a raft of significant LPs, leading his own group for an ESP-Disk and playing alongside Mansi like Albert Ayler, Cecil Taylor, Pharoah Sanders, Sonny Rollins and Don Cherry, before venturing on the West Coast in 1957. In 1986, *Cadence* magazine noted numbers of his passing, while Val Wilmer, in her book *As Serious As Your Life*, reported that she believed he had died sometime in the late 70s. When researcher Marshall Marette finally tracked him down to a tiny bistro in Los Angeles, Grimes explained how he had made the decision to drop out of the scene for primarily financial reasons, crossing the country in a failed attempt to make a career for himself as an actor and breaking bonds of homelessness and a raft of deadend jobs. When news of Grimes's re-emergence broke, William Parker immediately

denied him a double bass, allowing him to pick up on the traits that he had left in the air four decades earlier. With all of that accumulated baggage, tonight's duo performance was always going to be a poignant event, not least because it marked Grimes's return to the city where he was born in 1935.

While Grimes may have lost some of the ferocious power that prompted pianist Burton Greene to describe him as pulsing at the strings "like a lion", he still had the facility for coiling rhythms in ways that implies countless interesting lines of melody remains undimmed.

The first piece consisted of a long bass exchange, and though Parker's playing was audibly more accomplished, generating fluid tonal arcs that were satisfyingly tactile, it was Grimes that most bent the ear, with a

combination of rigorously concerned runs that impacted on Parker's conception like so many billiard balls and curiously muted, melodically idiosyncratic diversions that he teased apart like children's puzzles.

Parker swapped instruments for the remainder of the set, accompanying Grimes on shims, bamboo recorder and a series of haps, but it was the final piece, a bass duet in remembrance of musicians Malachi Favors and Walter Perkins, that really set the seal on the evening, with Parker smearing sord gasps from his strings while Grimes lowered over his bow, working a slack, ragged sawtooth pattern that eschewed sentimental shorthand in favour of more profound tonguing. Much more than a nostalgic celebration, tonight's performance was a potent slice of now. □

Top: Henry Grimes (left) and William Parker. Middle: Nobukazu Takemura solo and (bottom) with The Child's View Band

## NOBUKAZU TAKEMURA AND THE CHILD'S VIEW BAND

### LONDON UNION CHAPEL UK

BY MIKE BARNES

This was one of the most intriguing shows to tour the UK for a long time, not least because it was so difficult to imagine how a six-piece group would tackle Nobukazu Takemura's cerebral clamour. His three most recent albums for Third Jetkey showcase very different approaches of the Osaka-based multi-instrumentalist, sound sculptor, DJ and animator: 2002 saw the gleaming, tonal residues of *Sigh*, followed in early 2003 by the acute, cartoonish instrumentals and singing speech synthesizers of *20th*, and then came *Assembler*, with its lengthy pieces constructed from fragmented instrumental

sounds processed with an uncompromising severity.

The first of the two sets scheduled for the evening was tentatively billed as an improvisation. But anticipation rapidly gave way to disappointment as the performance soon developed into a sprawl of free playing devoid of inspiration. Drummer Jun Nagami broke into a loud, rolling, free-style groove but soon lost, building no repeat whatsoever with Takemura, whose inflected guitar meanderings were barely audible. Occasionaly flicking around with one of his three leopards, he cutted out the odd tap and ear-biting srawnoe. Then there was the real-time five visual, designed by Takemura and Aki Tsuyuki. The progressively distorted pulsed imagery merging into dazzling, light-on-water frames and cut with a few

playful claymation figures wobbling around on screen, was far more interesting than the music, but it wasn't the groundbreaking animation that would organically respond to the music as promised. After a little more than 20 minutes, there was a break in proceedings. Maybe the musicians were just getting warmed up? Surely the next piece had to be better? But no, they simply stood and left the stage. That was it. A vox pop among some of the purist purists indicated a shared sense of disbelief.

The Child's View Band was, thankfully, a slight improvement on the duds, desultory start. The idea of Takemura's compositions interpreted by a odd rock group of bass, drums, vibes and xylophone, with Takemura himself on laptop and guitar, held promise. But the group sounded unrefined and just too loose to play the

material in the right spirit. "*Falls Lake*" was charming on 10th, but here it was primly primed colours were dulled. One lunged for the empty imbecility of the singing speech computer on the recorded version, as live vocalist Aki Tsuyuki sounded strained in trying to emulate the song's verbiage, and she was only marginally in tune.

One impressive break-out on guitar and tuned percussion stood out anomalously, coming over like a cross between Tomase and Ameri *DIGI II* circa *Via There*. This was a moment of pleasure, elements in the rest of the performance, particularly when Matt Lea (also of *Isotope 237*) switched to double bass and Anna Mizoguchi's zigzagging tuned percussion etched out the melodies, but overall The Child's View Band didn't get or do justice to the material. They just didn't seem up for the task. □

## SUBCURRENT GLASGOW CCA UK

BY NEIL COOPER

Harding out earplugs at a festival designed to explore "the hidden wiring" linking early experimental composition with the new wave of contemporary electronics", as the programme notes have it, sends out some curious signals. Then again, given that the all-seated interior of the über-minimalist CCM space looks somewhere between a sushi bar and a packed cell, an air of cautious formality is implied from the off.

The certainly isn't the fault of the curator, The Wire's own David Keenan, who has

enthusiastically pulled together an ambitious collection of pan-generational avatars and mayflies, many of whom are nailing their Scottish indy, indeed, their UK debut. But with the Glasgow date of Nobukazu Takemura's Contemporary Music Network tour seemingly gathering steam, the venue's burn-on-seats sensitive management, for all the curating power of everything else that's on offer, spread out over three nights the fare feels a tad thin.

Nevertheless, Friday night's spars and whits

clut from machine age alchemist Norbert Moisling (of Voice Crack) and Barberofmagas solo player Jim Sauter accelerates from zero to 100 in an instant. Where Moisling zaps his targets dead centre, a hunched cooperator in search of secret formulae, Sauter bows lumbering zigzag patterns overhead, taking pot shots while on reconnaissance, his instrument becoming disembodied wriggles from its source to sound as gutturally unspeakable as possible.

There's an impeding playfully at play too. Moisling doesn't so much tick his switches as wave them in a prolonged interrogative, first tying with, then battering his waves across the table, breaching the code with nonstop force. Sauter's buky presence looms in constant twirling motion from the off, at one point giving the impression of a constituted bare dancing on his effects pedals, so intent is he in whipping up whooshing valleys in a meandering attack that's only occasionally slippery enough to collide into Moisling's own.

This is nothing, however, to the short sharp shock of Masa Yamazaki's *Masocene* persona. A wistfully block-did derivit, he flings himself into an apoplectic exercise in pure sonic terrorism that's a smash and grab red on the

surface, curtevering into oblivion without recourse to either safety net or government health warning. Barking out an angry mantra, his giant shadow withers and flails hirsute across the walls. Then, in less than ten minutes, it's over, and some in the rapt audience are perched enough from the experience to erupt into fits of liberating giggles. It's a sonor of sorts.

Merely, Yamazaki has received enough by the mid-night to have an altogether more static presence to his analogue synth project Space Machine, as a familiar army of soft swoops and over-tormented sequences dividends apparently but almost uninterestingly into the ether before projectors arms of orange and purple that melt into one another.

Double Leopards are even more spectral, if altogether more traditionally meditative on their path to enlightenment. Down on their knees from the beginning, the two boys and two girls of this asocial looking Bookend quartet utilise an array of plucked analogue white noise machines and guitar scrippins bent out of shape to disrupt the lush. Plugging into the pulsating sense left over from some east backwoods stool, they're caustically but metaculously beat it out to the middle distance and beyond.

Out of the gloom slowly evolves an all embracing lenguor, grooved through with naggling little rhythms that are tongue-tied, primal and after wonderfully prolonged exposure, the next best thing to holy陶aws then set's climes, one Double Leopard even covers his eyes with his hands, one was more likely lost in the nearest. The odd coupling of 1960s veteran Aramus Tschetsch and Thomas Meier's Kornfeld Der Jingling collaboration is an oddly sepiotic choice to close proceedings. Nominated in tribute to two warhorses by Katherin Stachowitsch, the pair impassively side by side. Körner in baseball cap, Tschetsch in stony grey and black.

Awash with glacial motifs, the slow-motion peaks of partially subsumed debris that ozone their way into the nervous system are exhaustingly concentrated, however gently they strike the audience into submission. Even a mobile phone's rude intrusion (twice) can't shatter the aura, despite Aramus Tschetsch's magnificently hawkish series of apes. Beyond such acuity, the broadening chains dripping across each other towards slow bloom provide closure of sorts, but little accompanying thunder. It all, 100 pairs of earplugs go unused. □

A photograph of a vintage movie poster for the film 'boredome'. The poster features a large, stylized title 'boredome' in a red, lowercase, sans-serif font. Above the title, in a smaller black font, is the text 'DIRECTED BY RICHARD P. JONES'. Below the title, in a red font, is 'PLUS VERY SPECIAL GUESTS'. Underneath that, in a black font, are 'BLACK DICE' and 'PLUS LIGHTNING BOLT'. At the bottom of the poster, in a black font, is 'TUESDAY 30 MARCH' followed by a red 'SOLD OUT' stamp. To the right of the stamp, the name 'DON SCALA' is written in a black font.

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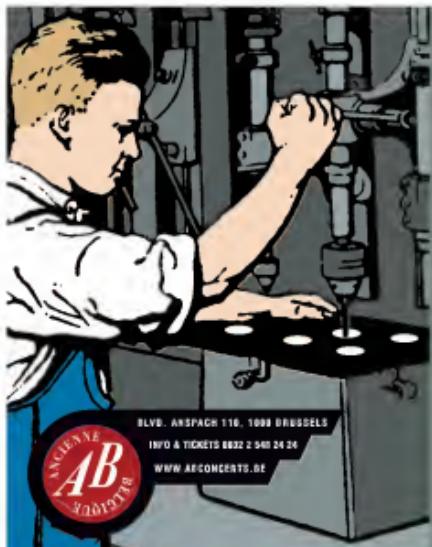
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April 2004

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11 LONDON The Space,  
Isle of Dogs 020 7516 7799  
13 SWANSEA Brangwyn  
George Hall 01792 479 715  
14 HARLECH Theatr Ardudwy  
01766 780 667  
15 RUTHIN Canolfan Glyndwr  
01824 765 274  
16 HOLYHEAD Ucheldre Centre  
01407 763 361  
17 MACHYNLETH Y Tabernacl  
01654 793 355

Music by Steve Reich, Philip Glass, John Zorn, Herbie Hancock,  
Andrew Poppy, Orlando Gough, Conlon Nancarrow,  
Charlie Barber & DJ Jaffa

Photo: Dave Diggens

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SU 04/04

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FEAT. DAVE RAKUNSON/MICHEL COARD/HARMONIA &  
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TH 15/04

LIEBMAN/SWALLOW/NUSSBAUM

SA 17/04

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# Out There

This month's selected festivals, live events, clubs and broadcasts.

Send info to *The Wire*, 2nd Floor East, 88-94 Wentworth Street, London E1 7SA, UK  
Fax +44 (0)20 7422 5011, [listings@thewire.co.uk](mailto:listings@thewire.co.uk). Compiled by Phil England

## UK festivals

### ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES #2

As we went to press there were still tickets left for the second weekend festival on England's south coast, the one curated by Sonic Youth, Steven Malmkvist & the Jicks and organisers Foundation. Performers include Love, Vibracathedral Orchestra, Jackie-O Motherfucker, Greenhoof, Domo, Cat Power, Lightning Bolt, Carla Boulach Red Headed Shredder Show, Le Tigre, Charabimboes, Vincent Gallo, Espos Enrages, Wolf Eyes, Double Loops, Bored Pond, Arab Stoop, Tinderticks and more. Camber Sands Holiday Centre, 2-4 April, £10 tickets chelten, accommodation, 020 7734 0932, [www.apkfest.com](http://www.apkfest.com)

### DEB'DEAT

NRCPFOLK  
Annual dance weekender with an across-the-board line-up. Features KRS-1, Becks, Flew, Little Tibet, Kit 606, Kirchhundroo, LFO, Edan, Tk, Sage Francis, Horace Andy, Dub Cante, Seunghyun DJ (Den Letts & Dan Dorowian), Theo Parrish and more. Label showcases include Big Dex, Ghostry International, Tigrabeats, All Records and Lex. Norfolk Honky Tonk's Holiday Village, 23-25 April, £95 includes chalet and access to Pundit facilities, 0870 361 626, [www.deb'deatt.net](http://www.deb'deatt.net)

### DERBY JAZZ WEEK

DERBY  
A week of jazz concerts in the Midlands headed by a couple of shout-out shows: the AMW duo of pianist John Tilbury and guitarist Keith Rowe (Derby VoiceBox, 3 April, 2pm) and The Matthew Herbert Big Band (Derby Assembly Rooms, 4, 8pm)

### FREEFORM V.1

WARRINGTON  
One-day mini-festival of improvised music featuring evening performances by Philip Jeck, Eddie Prévost and Psychotic Challenge (7-11pm, £6.50), a workshop and afternoon performances by Niall Ntisi, Faberman, Daniel Weaver and Swung Dash (1.30pm, free).

Warrington Pyramid Arts Centre, 10 April, 01925 442345, [www.pyramids.org.uk](http://www.pyramids.org.uk), [www.electromash.co.uk](http://www.electromash.co.uk)

### ONLY CONNECT

#### LONDON

The annual series of new collaborations and cross-arts experiments at London's Barbican has added two more events to the previously announced line-up. Geoff Smith performs a live soundtrack to the home classic *The Cabinet Of Dr Caligari* on hammer dulcimer (18 April) and indie rockers St Etienne present an evening of film and music entitled *Perverse Possibilities* (22). The rest of the line-up features remixes of Frank Zappa material by the 20-piece Absolute Ensemble with two original Mothers and Bongo Bases (1 April); a Billie Holiday tribute hosted by Neneh Cherry, put together by jazz drummer Terri Lyne Carrington and featuring Formula Bassa, Angelique Kidjo and others (5); black and Asian writers exploring the contemporary meaning of family with DJ Clark Deak, rapper and musician Aun Ghosh (6-8); composer Barry Adamson collaborating with dancer Russell Maliphant (8); and Hel Hiller presents his tribute to Nine Inch Nails and Fender Felt with guests Carla Bley and David Thomas (24). London Barbican, 0845 120 7511, [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

### TRIPYCH

#### GLASGOW, EDINBURGH & ABERDEEN

Packed and eclectic festival happening in three cities over three weekends and featuring (among others) Wire, Art Ensemble, Idris Seemore & Kuma, Four Tet, Pan Sonic, Fenster, Mathew Herbert, Lans, Yot Kha, Animal Collective, Colleen, Kit 606, Kirchhundroo, Modith, Mün, Movetone, Papa M, Peanut Butter Wolf, The Rippin' Artist, To Rococo Rot, Innes Ann, Cees & Cosey, Or Robert Meek, Thomas Fehmann, Jean-Jacques Perrey, Andrew Logg Orlam, Gabry Prins Paul, Flightless, Converge, Dr Alimando, Jerry Dammers and John Peel. Label showcases include Matto, Demmo, Geographic and Les Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen various venues, 28 April-2 May, 0870 220 1116, [www.triplych4.com](http://www.triplych4.com)

### VIS-ONIC

#### BELFAST, COLERAINE & DERRY

Intermediale audio-visual festival that begins in March and continues this month. The event features installations, live performances and film screenings that investigate the crossover between sound and image. April's programme includes an exhibition of invented instruments by Pongho Instruments (1-3 April), with performance, seminar and interactive installation (1, noon); Dick Mills of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop presents an introductory history of the unit followed by a showing of the documentary *The Alchemists Of Sound* (1); Scenarist's 52 Spaces – A Low Unheim with film of Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Eclipse* followed by Scenarist (1); new moving image works from Japan followed by Old Tree (2); and a R&B concert showcase featuring Stephan Mathieu, Akozen and Mikael Stavansson plus Scenarist (3). Belfast, Coleraine and Derry various venues, 3 times and more (NB admission to many events is free), 028 9024 8185/9033 0893, [www.vis-onic.co.uk](http://www.vis-onic.co.uk), [www.movingfrommusic.co.uk](http://www.movingfrommusic.co.uk)

## International festivals

### A JACKSON IN YOUR HOUSE

#### BRUGES

Storied Free Jazz (Great Black Music) And Cinema Nova, this bold piece of programming mixes live performance, film screenings and two exhibitions in celebration of the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s. There are live appearances by Arthur Doyle and Vibracathedral Orchestra (8 April), Annie Bissett (9), Noah Howard Quartet featuring Bodhi (15), Peter Brötzmann solo (22), Mike Ladd (23) and La Canna, Pitcher and Darkness (24). Film shows include Michael Snow's *New York Eye And Ear Control* featuring Alasdair Agass, Ambulans featuring Col Taylor, A Paris featuring Luc Fennet, Sound featuring Roland Kirk and John Cage, Phil Niblock's *Magic Sun* featuring Sun Ra, and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Appunti Per Un'Orchestra Africana*. There is an

exhibition of photographs by Jacques Biseaglia, a visualist photographer to the BBC label, and an exhibition which pays homage to the late bassist Peter Kowald. Brussels various venues, 8-25 April, [www.nova-cinema.com](http://www.nova-cinema.com)

### ATHENS CREATIVE MEDIA ENCOUNTER

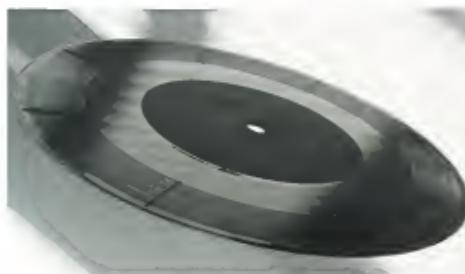
USA  
Also known as the Arme Festival, this jazz and creative music meeting is put together by saxophonist Kit Wandersma. Alongside concerts featuring Peter Brötzmann Chicago Tentet, Jon Menken, Ivo Jovanic, The Thing and Joe McPhee, Atomic, School Days, Free Fall, Vandersmark 5 and Kent Nessler, there will be workshops, lectures and an exhibition of artwork by Peter Brotzmann, Georgia, Athens various venues, 1-4 April, \$10 per concert, \$100 festival pass, [www.athensfestival.com](http://www.athensfestival.com)

### SANTA FE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC

USA  
Features radio broadcasts, installations and live performances by composer-in-residence Paulette Oliveros, Larry Polansky, Gareth Davis and The CSF Electroacoustic Ensemble, New Mexico Center for Contemporary Arts and the College of Santa Fe, 16-17 April, [kunsm.org](http://kunsm.org), music cst.edu

### NEW SOUND, NEW YORK

USA  
A celebration of New York as a city for experimental music on the 25th anniversary of the defining event New Music, New York. The centrepiece concert at New York Town Hall reunites the performers from the original event – Launne Anderson, Robert Ashley, Philip Glass, Meredith Monk, Paulette Oliveros and Steve Reich (27 April). The city-wide, six-week programme also includes a Thursday night concert series at the Kitchen featuring Michael J. Schumacher, Katie Matthes, Matthew Ostrow and others (1 April), Ann Leder, Nic Collins, David Behrman, Ben Neill, Kate Halska, James Fo and Jim O'Rourke (6), the Shape collective (15), and 40 artists contributing sound pieces to five audio-visual 'listening stations' (22). The Kitchen Art Gallery hosts newly commissioned works by



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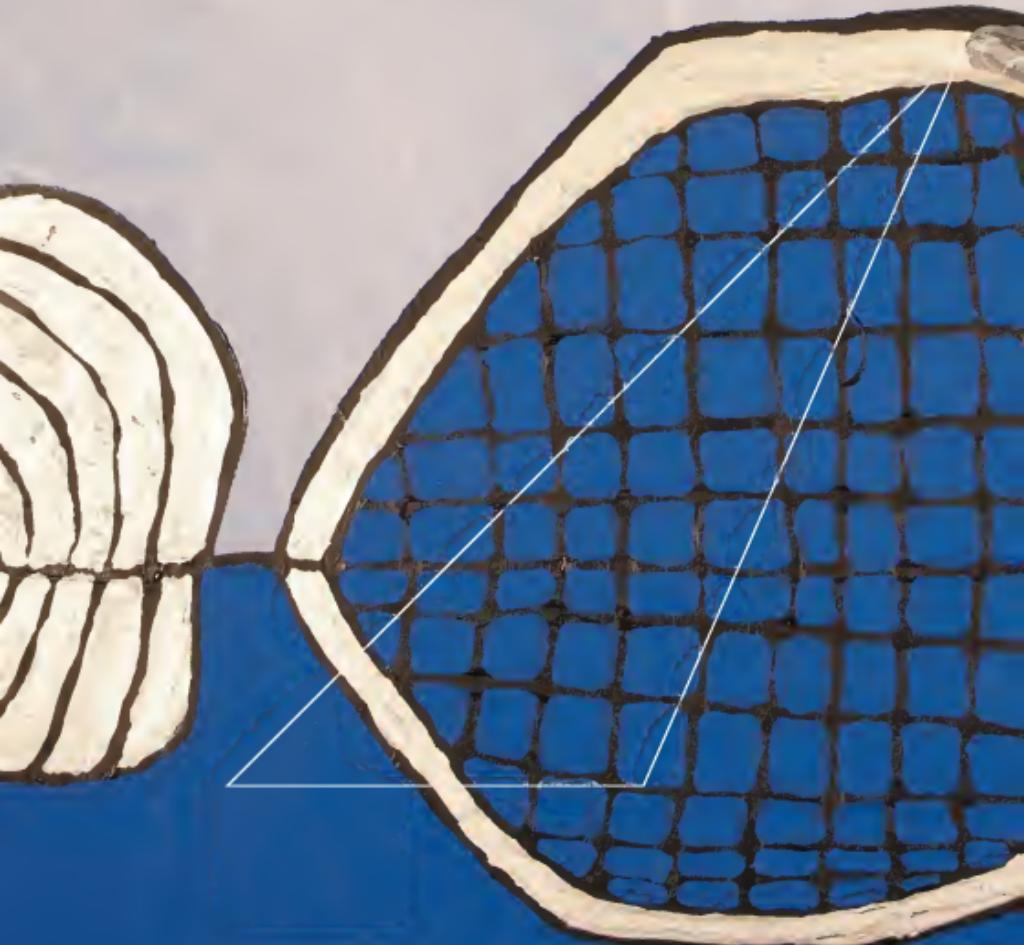
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# Out There

## OPAQUE

Improv/noise guitar duo tour promoting their new album *New Ways*. Abendsee Drunks (8 April), Nottingham venue the (12), Leeds Terminus Club (13), Sheffield Other Music (14), Stoke Talbot Hotel (16). opaque@msn.com

## OXFORD IMPROVISERS

A day workshop with bassist and composer Simon Holf culminates in an evening concert featuring local improvising musicians. Oxford Brooks University Headington Drama Studio, 3 April, 01865 728685, www.oxfordimprovisers.com

## RAW GOODS

The percussion and piano duo of David Appleton and Mark West tour compositions by John Zorn, Orlando Gough, Charlie Barber/DJ Jaffe, Andrew Poppy, Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Conlon Nancarrow and Herbie Hancock. There will also be screenings of digital video by young artists. Cardiff Chapter (8 April), London The Space (13), Swansea Brangwyn Hall (13), Harwich Town Hall (14), Rother Yacht Brynhyfryd (15), Holyhead Uwchradd Centre (16) and Macclesfield Y恋tem (17). 029 2049 7157, www.soundsfromthecode.co.uk

## STEVE REID

Rare UK performance by a jazz drummer who backed Charles Tindley, Sam Rivers, James Brown, Mertie And The Wondellas and Fela Kuti. Reid will play with his quartet at London Soho Pizza Express (13-14 April) and then perform his solo piece *Drum Story* at London Stereophonic where he will also appear in a quartet with local improvisers John Edwards on bass and saxophonists Tony Bevan, Alan Wilkinson and Nat Catcheside (15). www.aztec-reid.com

## Club spaces

### BACK IN YOUR TOWN

New series of music events curated by Ashley Wales and Ian R Watson kicks off with The

Twoeepairs Big Rock featuring Wilkes and Watson with Steve Bennett, Lal Coxhill, Pete Flood and Peter Marsh, London Red Rose Club, 15 April, 8pm, £5/£3, 07947 137215, www.ashleywales.com

## BOAT TING

Improved music, poetry and rock monthly on a boat moored on the Thames. This month, acoustic Improv from The Alka Waz Taz, electric Improv from 450,000 Flakes with poet John Plant, surfing sounds from They Come From The Sea and 'trombone' poetry from Paul Taylor. London The Naut Club, 26 April and every last Monday of the month, 7pm, £5/E2.50, 020 8670 5094, www.boat-ting.com

## BREAKIN' BREAD

Breakfast, funk and HipHop monthly featuring guest DJs George & Bones from Grand Slam magazine and Fryer, guest 8-Bay crew Chidzhe. Of The Monkey Basket and Fenderheads plus resident DJs London The Rhythm Factory, 17 April, 8pm-4am, £8/£5, 07867 547 608, www.breakinbread.org

## BROKEN CHANNEL

Evening or work related to closed-circuit TV surveillance with Kerte Matthews and Riz Maden appearing live plus film by Colours, Ultra-red and others. Bristol Cube, Middlesbrough, 17 April, 8pm, £6/£5, 0117 907 4190, www.brokencube.com

## KLINKER

Two-weekly experimental music and performance club. All shows feature a number of contrasting acts. Confirmed acts of time to go include: Cheap Blanket featuring Dylan Bates, Alan Duran & Andy Blaie (1 April), saxophonist Marie Spender with Vanya Weston, Gail Brand, Sensor Net and Dave Fowler (6), Timor Wets & Jemima Heris, God's Marbs (8). Not walking here Yorkshire, Instrument bioneer Rod Cooper visiting from Australia (13), Ian Hinchliffe, The Bohem Brothers with Richard Thomas, Kindness/May/Lash, (15), Tidbeck from

Hungary, Drago Mogni Trio (20), Emile Sercombe, The Paisley Stones, Monroeville (22), Green Ray, Crown (27), collage making night with free soup and bread plus Morgan Gruhman with Mark Sanders, Vinyan Weston & Gail Brand, plus Sles, Charlotte Hug & John Edwards. London Session, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8pm, £5/£2, 020 8806 8216, www.londonsession.info

## MYBROKEANESEL

Rare UK visit from Californian electronic auteur The RP. Artist playing live along with Brighton's Freestorm plus former Stock, Hassens & Walkmen man Matt Wond on the decks. London Updates at the Garage, 25 April, 7pm, £8, 020 7807 1878, www.mybrokeanesel.com

## RAY'S JAZZ AT FOYLES

Monthly series of 'ice early evening' improvisation spots at this recently relocated record shop. This month, solo tenorbone from the madcap virtuoso Alan Barnes. London Ray's Jazz at Foyle's, 22 April, 8pm, free, 020 7440 3205, www.foyle.co.uk

## SPRAWL

Oriental new music monthly featuring Peter Casciaro on guitar, bouzouki and live electronics, Daniel Bio & Ross Palmer mixing up jazz, classical influences and pop, and tassep sounds from Simeon Longs. London The Old House, 14 April, 7.30-11.30pm, £4/£3, 020 7251 8787, www.duse.com/sprawl, www.littlehouse.co.uk

## WORK IN PROGRESS

At this new improv space, the house duo of saxophonist Nathaniel Critchlow and AMM percussionist Eddie Pavelt will be joined by a different duo each Wednesday during April. London The Meadbs, 7, 14, 21 & 28 April, 8-10pm, free, 020 7739 5095, www.londonworkinprogress.com

## WOULD YOU LYCOPODIUM?

This month's name for the Bohem brothers' experimental music weekly features Martin Speeher/Steve Bessford/Mark Sandes and

Charles Heywood/Ashley Marsh/Martin (5), Klunk and Anne Hansen (12), The Hungover Group and Chas Ambler/Greg Morgan (19) and Stuart Fisher/Steve Mayes and Pepe Gozio (26), London Bannington Centre, Mondays, Barn, 14/13, 07904 067409

## 318

Monthly new music and art event in a converted church. This month Chicago House inspired work from Leads Beckett and Stone Taylor and songs from Heather Society plus screenings of short films and videos and edocids DJ sets. London 291 Gallerie, 14 April, Barn, free, 020 7613 5676, www.318.co.uk

## Incoming

### FREEDOM OF THE CITY

#### UK

Annual weekend festival of improvised music featuring AMM, MEX, Roger Smith & Lewis Nehols, Clive Bell & Sylvie Hallé, Quaque, Alex Ward quartet, Gail Brand & Morgan Guzman, Ensemble, Paul Rutherford, Paul Derrim Trio, David Stanssen, Stein Sæsli, Dan Palmer Trio and The Gathering meets London Improvisers Orchestra. London Conway Hall, 1-3 May, £15-6 per concert, £37-10 per day, £40/£25 festival pass, 020 7242 8032, www.mesmerised.co.com

### THE MAGIC BAND

#### UK

Principal Captain Beaufort members are back for a few more dates. Brighton Concorde 2 (23 June), Manchester Bridgewater Hall (24), Glastonbury Festival (25), Bristol Academy (27) and London Garage (28-29 June). www.beaufort.com □

**Out There** items for inclusion in the May issue should reach us by Wednesday 31 March

# UK Radio

## National

### BBC RADIO 1 97.99 FM

#### JOHN PEEL

Monday-Friday 10pm-midnight. Leftfield music across the board

#### GILLES PETTERSON

Thursday midnight-2am

Hot Acid jazz

#### FABIO & GROOVERIDER

Saturday 1-3am. Westend drum 'n' bass

#### WESTWOOD RAP SHOW

Friday 9.11pm/Saturday 9pm-midnight. Hip Hop focus

#### REGGAE DANCEHALL NITE

Saturday midnight-2am. Bass culture

#### TBC RADIO 3 90-93 FM

#### WHITE JUNCTION

Wednesday-Thursday 10.15-11pm. New Music compendium

#### IAZZ LEGENOS

Friday 4-5pm. Archive recordings

#### ANDY KERSHAW

Sunday 10.15-11midnight. World Music

#### JAZZ ON 3

Friday 11.30pm-1am

Modern jazz in session and concert

#### WORLD ROUTES

Saturday 1-2pm

Lucy Dorian presents a travelogue of global music

#### JAZZ FILE

Saturday 6-6.30pm

Documentary magazine

#### HEAR AND NOW

Saturday 10-11.45pm. Late. New Music magazine

#### MIXING IT

Friday 10.15-11.30pm

Hyper-edictive mix of avant seeds

Links to Net radio broadcasts can be found at the [TBC Radio 3 website](http://www.tbcradio3.co.uk). [www.tbcradio3.co.uk](http://www.tbcradio3.co.uk)

## Regional

### BBC LANCASHIRE

95.5/103.9/104.5 FM, 855 MW

#### ON THE WIRE

Saturday 10pm-midnight. The Wire's club column. Steve Barker mixes it up wildstyle

#### BBC MERSEYSIDE

95.8 FM, 1485 MW

#### FMS

Sunday 10midnight-2am. Freewheeling mix of avant sounds

#### BBC SCOTLAND 92.4-94.7 FM

#### FROM BEBOP TO HIPHOP

Wednesday 7.15-9.05pm, Sunday 10.05pm. midnite. Jazz and no-beats

CABLE RADIO 89.9 FM (MILTON KEYNES)

#### THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS

Friday 10pm-midnight. Eclectic avant mix

#### JUICE 107.2 FM (BRIGHTON)

#### TOTALY WIRED

Sunday 11pm-1am. Leftfield new music

#### KISS 100 FM (LONDON)

#### PATRICK FORCE

Sunday 1-3am. Eclectic jazz/noise/rock mix

#### MATT JAM LAMONT

Wednesday 2-4am. Breakbeat science

#### LONDON LIVE 94.9 FM

#### CHARLIE GILLET

Saturday 8.30pm. World music, roots and R&B

#### RANKIN' MISS P: RIDDIMS & BLUES

Saturday 9-10pm. Shredly roots

#### RESONANCE 104.4 FM (LONDON)

Genuinely alternative radio, with live streaming at [www.resonancefm.com](http://www.resonancefm.com) (see Special Events)

#### XFM 104.9 FM (LONDON)

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# WIRE

Issue 2003.12 December 2003  
Clouddead  
George Ligotti, Art Bears, Mass  
Four Tet, Olga Neuwirth



# WIRE

Issue 2003.13 January 2004  
Einstürzende Neubauten



# WIRE

Issue 2003.14 February 2004  
Arthur Russell  
Jerome Rothenberg  
Paul Niessen-Love  
Matt Rogalsky



# WIRE

Issue 2003.15 March 2004  
Damon & Naomi  
Basil Kirchh  
Matthew Bourne





## Back Issues

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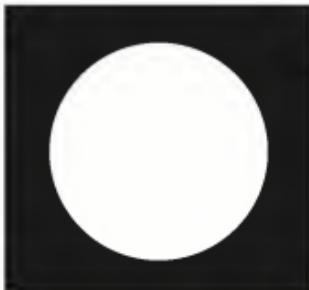
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# Epiphanies

Samantha Brown learns how hurtful lies can be from an Elizabeth Cotten song



Elizabeth Cotten lies and the absolute truth

Cover versions are a two-edged sword. In the wrong hands they can be a horribly messy business. As a notoriously erratic performing artist, Bob Dylan has never needed outside help getting his hands messy. Through prolonged periods of the so-called Never Ending Tour he launched in 1988, he has come across as a baleful, driven presence, not so much struggling with inner demons as his own boredom with having to pick himself up from the floor and slug his way through a body of work that no longer enchanted him the way it evidently still did his audience. Up until the mid-90s, he frequently sang as though he was sick of the sound of his own voice, or at least the way it bounced back at him from his more fanatical followers' adulation.

Contrary as ever, the sick at heart troubadour, seemingly alienated from the most significant canon of the 20th century, began supplementing his set with cover versions drawn from a songbook ranging between crenures-old folk songs, haunting mountain bluesgrass spirituals and the cheekiest MOR ballads. Very soon these became set highlights – sometimes if only for the sheer perversity of hearing Dylan croak-croak "Help Me Make It Through The Night", for instance. Not only has he been less cavalier in his performances of material other than his own, but also he has been rediscovering his voice these past 1.5 years by imitating those of other writers. And of the 200-odd – some of them extremely odd – songs Dylan has covered over the duration of his Never Ending Tour, one in particular, called "Oh Babe It Ain't No Lie", moved me enough to track it back to its source.

The first time Dylan performed it – during his NET run, at least – in January 1990 at an uncharacteristically upbeat four-hour warm-up concert for its latest leg, in Toad's Place, New Haven – he threw himself on the blades of a dozen covers and miraculously emerged from them all unsathed. If the same couldn't be said for all the songs,

however, Dylan reserved a special tenderness for the hurt yet defiant lyric and easily bruised melody of "Oh Babe It Ain't No Lie". As a vessel for a Dylan performance, a song about lying and its painful consequences is not in itself a surprise. Trying to figure out what it was in his voice that wouldn't let go threw me back on one of Dylan's own great lying songs, this time the studio take of a Dylan original, "Idiot Wind", from his 1975 masterpiece *Blood On The Tracks*. And for sure, the opening lines of both songs bear a fleeting resemblance.

"One old woman Lord in this town" sings Dylan at Toad's Place. "Keeps a-telling her lies on me/Wish to my soul that old woman would die/Keeps a-telling her lies on me/Oh Babe it ain't no lie [x3]". Know that? Me I'm living is very high." "Idiot Wind" opens from a not dissimilar corner: "Someone's got it in for me, they're planting stories in the press/Whoever it is I wish they'd cut it out but when they will I can only guess."

Both vocals are profoundly affecting yet the difference between them in tone couldn't be more marked. In the first, the singer is curled up in the corner, in the other he comes out fighting. It's only after tracking down the original "Oh Babe It Ain't No Lie" to Elizabeth Cotten's 1958 *Folkyways* album *Freight Train And Other North Carolina Folk Songs And Tunes*, and hearing its composer perform it, that it began to make sense. Born in 1892, as a young girl the left-handed Cotten taught herself to play banjo and guitar upside down, a method through which she devised her influential folk and ragtime blues picking. Her playing was later identified as the North Carolina picking style akin to Rev Gary Davis and Mississippi John Hurt when she began sharing bills with them on folk and blues stages in the 1960s. That she got to play with them at all is not without irony as, god-forbid, to a fault, Cotten had pretty much given up playing for 40 years after her church condemned secular music as the devil's plaything. Indeed she only began playing

again when she picked up a guitar in the household of the famous folk family the Seegers, where she worked as a domestic help, and Mike Seeger coaxed her into recording the pieces she remembered adapting and writing as a girl.

On a live album recorded in the late 1970s, when she was now in her eighties, she described the gestation of "Oh Babe": "Now the story behind that," she says, "the old lady caused my mother to punish me because she's told my mother I sassied her and I didn't. And Momma kept me inside the house... It hurt my feelings because the woman, Miss Mary, I liked her very much and to think she would tell Momma something. Momma punish me, and I lay in bed at night and cry right easy and I made this little verse up about her and I'd sit on the end of my porch and play it and sing it as loud as I could, and she would say to me, That certainly is a pretty song, what is it? See? And I wanted to say, Miss Mary it's about you, but I couldn't tell her that because I'd have got punished again. Miss Mary died and she didn't know what this song was about her. Momma died and she didn't know what it is about either. Now I'm gonna play it I'll want for you!"

So here's a woman disarmingly evoking, from the distance and wisdom of 40 and more years, all the anger and defiance her young girl self who wrote it could muster. And here's Dylan singing the same song three years after the woman who wrote it died (she was 92), singing her young self's song, as projected through the mature Cotten's version. And it suddenly becomes clear that here's a song that cannot be sung in any other voice or from any other perspective than its author's. The process of honouring the song by singing it in Cotten's voice, without lapsing into a form of vocal transvestism, taught Dylan something missing from his own angry hurt voices: tolerance and vulnerability.

And just for the record, this Samantha Brown never lived in Bob Dylan's house for about four or five months. □

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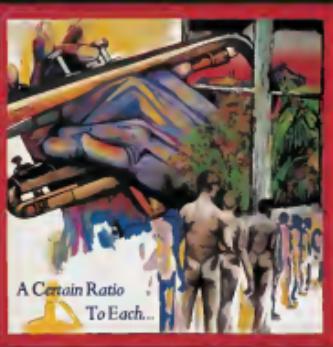
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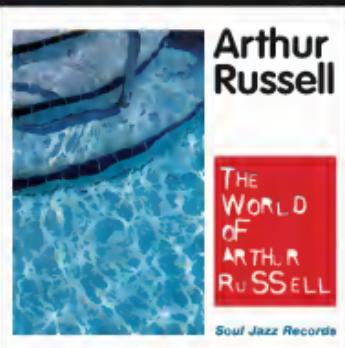


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